British Columbia
Reading and Written Expression
Assessment

1988

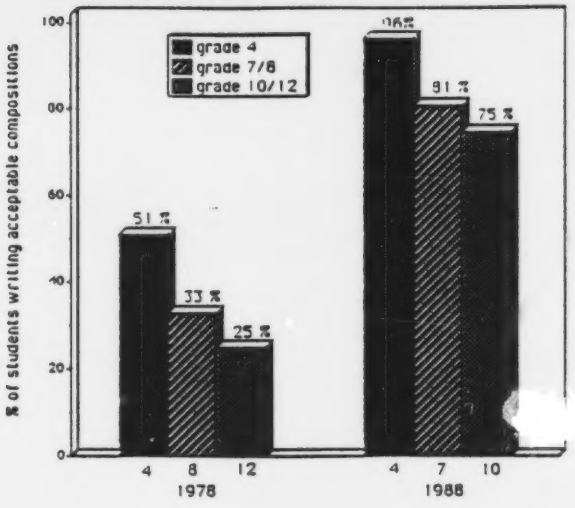
Provincial Report

· MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ·

Province of
British Columbia

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Figure 1.4
Extended narrative (overall impact):
Writing achievement in 1978 and 1988



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Extended narrative (mechanics/style):
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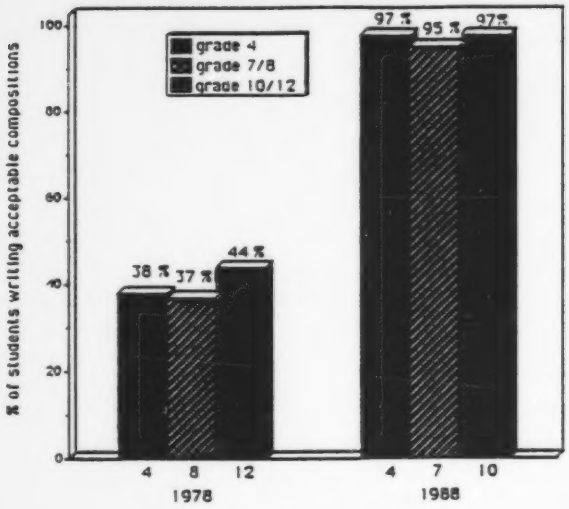
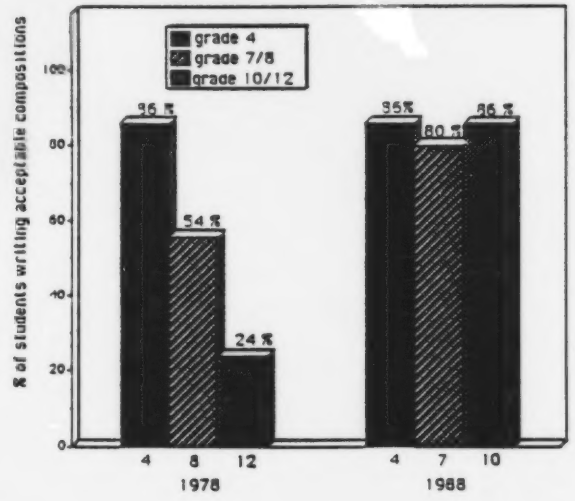


Figure 1.6
Opinion writing:
Writing achievement in 1978 and 1988



The above graphs appear on pages 7 and 8 of the Provincial Report for the 1988 Reading and Written Expression Assessment. The numbers for 1988 in the report are wrong. Please replace with the graphs on this page.

1988 B.C. Reading and Written Expression Assessment

Provincial Report

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PART I: OVERVIEW

HIGHLIGHTS

B.C. students demonstrate high levels of both reading and writing performance, and extremely positive attitudes. Overall, results suggest that students today find increasing pleasure in both reading and writing, and are more competent than their predecessors over the last 10 years. Following are some of the main findings of the assessment:

Reading

- More than 80% of students can read and understand basic program material; 85% at grade 4, 89% at grade 7, and 82% at grade 10.
- Female students read significantly better than their male counterparts.
- Students have little difficulty understanding information which has been explicitly stated. Almost 90% of students achieve competent scores for "literal comprehension" questions.
- Students have some difficulty in making personal judgments about what they have read. Marking committees commented on these deficiencies at all levels.
- Comparisons with 1984 reading achievement indicate an improvement in reading at grade 7 and no change at the grade 10 level. While improvement likely occurred in grade 4, no direct comparative data were available.
- Students in grade 4 and grade 7 report more enthusiasm about reading in 1988 than in the 1984 assessment. This change in attitudes is dramatic.
- Grade 10 students are less enthusiastic than the younger students and show no change in attitudes since 1984.
- Students with positive attitudes read better than students with more negative attitudes.
- Those students who have access to more reading opportunities inside and outside of the classroom achieve substantially higher reading comprehension results. These differences in achievement are larger at grade 10 than at the lower grades.
- Student achievement is lower in classes where teachers place high emphasis on the use of workbooks.
- Those students who do not have access to a rich reading environment at home are more likely to receive workbook exercises to do in school. Teachers should make a stronger effort to provide a stimulating reading environment for all students.
- Most students do not engage in reading strategies involving reflection, elaboration, or discussion concerning their reading materials.

Writing

- The majority of students can write both extended or short papers that meet the basic goals of the curriculum (over 85% at grade 4, over 75% at grade 7, and over 73% at grade 10).

- Overall, students exhibit a strong engagement with their topics, effective generation of ideas, and remarkable fluency. Writing at grade 10 is distinguished by its personal content and honesty.

- Female students write substantially better than their male counterparts.

- Writing performance has improved since the last assessment in 1978. Within the past 10 years, the percentage of students producing acceptable compositions has increased by 40%.

- A large portion of students expressed positive attitudes towards writing.

- Over 40% of students at each grade level report some extra-curricular writing practice.

- Students with positive attitudes write better than students with more negative attitudes.

- Those students who write extensively in their leisure time write better than students who report fewer writing activities.

- Most students report doing some basic editing of their writing.

- Although three-quarters of all students report forming mental pictures before writing, the use of other pre-writing strategies is not common.

- Overall, students do not consider their audience before, during, or after writing.

- Few students work with others or consult over writing tasks.

- The availability of a large number of books in the home is strongly related to better writing performance.

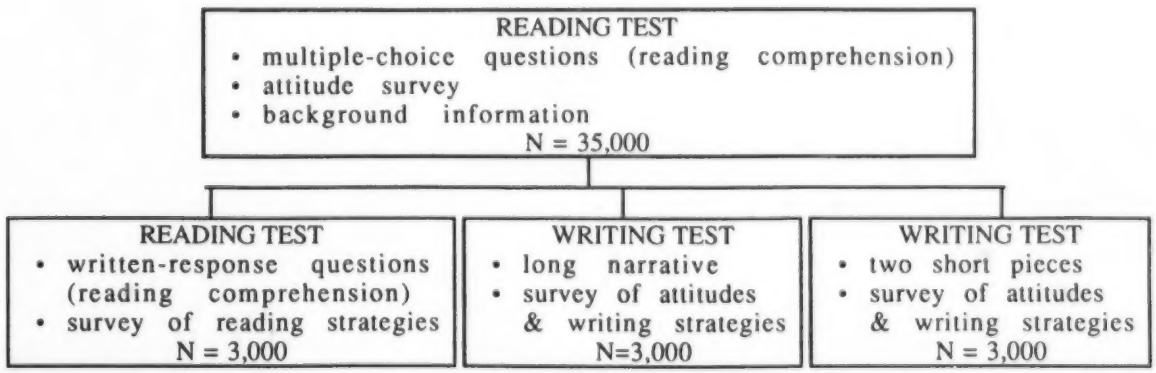
INTRODUCTION

In May 1988, the reading and writing performance of British Columbia students in grades 4, 7, and 10 were assessed as part of the Provincial Learning Assessment Program. Since the inception of the program in 1976, reading has been assessed every four years; written expression, however, was previously evaluated only in 1978.

The 1988 Assessment of Reading and Written Expression was designed to examine the following issues:

- To what extent are students in grades 4, 7, and 10 achieving the English reading and writing objectives specified in the language arts curriculum guides for British Columbia schools?
- To what extent have the levels of student achievement changed since the last assessment of reading in 1984 and the assessment of written expression in 1978?
- What attitudes do students hold toward reading and writing?
- What relationships exist between student achievement and classroom practices?
- What recommendations are suggested by the assessment?

As illustrated below, all B.C. students in grades 4, 7, and 10 responded to multiple-choice reading comprehension tests designed for their grade level. Random samples of these students wrote one of three additional tests: a reading test requiring extended written responses to questions about reading selections; an "extended" writing test requiring students to compose a long narrative; or a "concise" writing test requiring students to produce one short paper expressing a personal opinion and one short descriptive article. Appendix A provides further information about the procedures for this assessment.



Chapter 1: Reading and Writing (1987-1988) - Improvements in Achievement and Attitudes

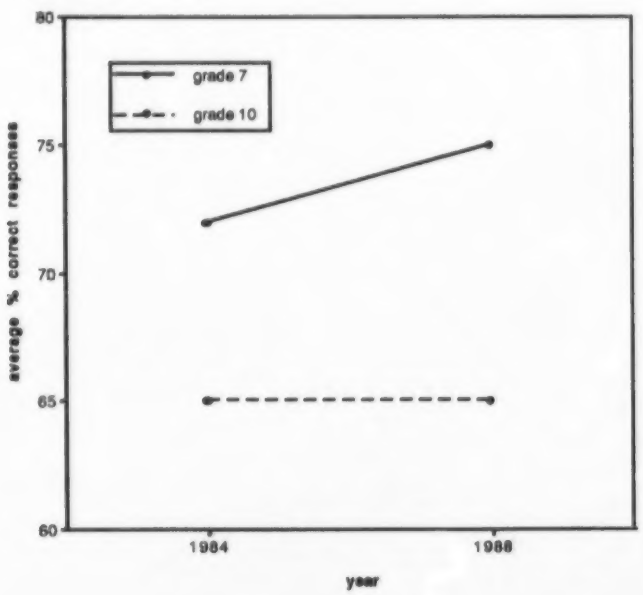
The 1988 reading and writing assessment gives educators a wealth of information about the abilities, habits, and attitudes of B.C. students, and about features of the current language arts program. The evidence indicates that most B.C. students read and write at acceptable standards. Most teachers emphasize program features that appear to promote positive student performances, and overall, language arts programs effectively link curriculum to instruction and evaluation.

Because most assessment materials and procedures are not directly comparable between years, it is difficult to draw many direct comparisons to past assessments. Nevertheless, the available evidence indicates a strong improvement in both the reading and writing performance and in attitudes of B.C. students in 1988.

1.1 Reading

Interpretation panels have consistently expressed satisfaction with student reading performance over four assessments (1975/76, 1980, 1984, and 1988). Although grade 7 ratings have improved slightly, overall comparisons of panel ratings suggest stability in both student performance and panel expectations. In the 1988 assessment, several questions were repeated from the 1984 assessment at grades 7 and 10. There was a small improvement in achievement at grade 7 and no change at the grade 10 level. Direct comparisons with 1975/76 and 1980 are not possible.

Figure 1.1
Comparison of 1984 and 1988 reading comprehension results (grades 7 & 10 only)



The same questions were used in 1984 and 1988 to measure student attitudes toward reading and to identify reading practices. Results show that grade 4 and grade 7 students in 1988 have more positive opinions about reading and read more than their counterparts in 1984. Comparisons with earlier assessments are difficult to make. Student attitudes were quite stable between 1980 and 1984.

As shown in the following graphs, these changes are very large. The most dramatic change has been in the amount of reading by grade 4 students. In 1984, grade 4 students were reading considerably less than students in the other grades. In 1988, grade 4 students were reading more than the grade 10 students and nearly as much as the grade 7 students. Grade 10 students, however, show no change over the past four years.

Figure 1.2
Student attitudes toward reading:
Comparison of 1984 and 1988 results

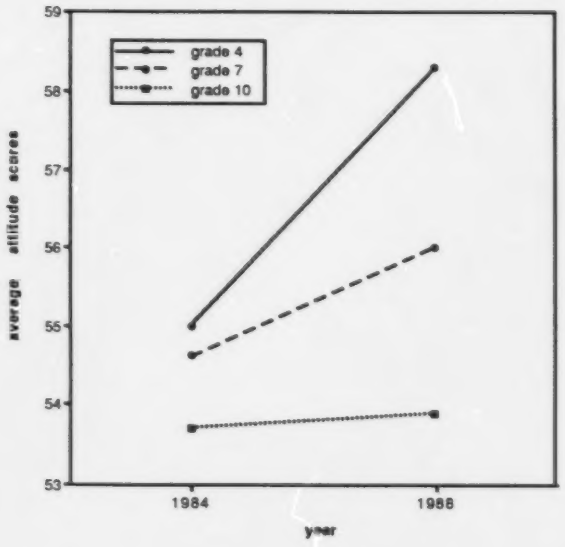
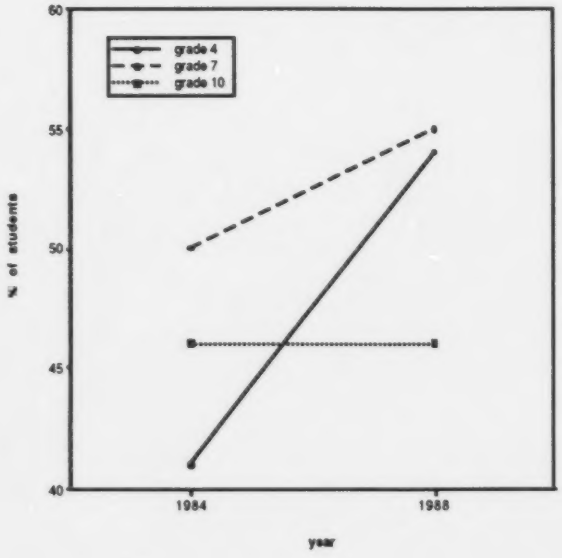


Figure 1.3
Student's report of reading 1/2 hour or more:
Comparison of 1984 and 1988 results



Students who read more and students who have more positive attitudes toward reading tend to have higher reading achievement scores. Because of the changes shown in the above graphs for grade 4, it is anticipated that there has also been some improvement at this level in reading achievement between 1984 and 1988.

It is not possible to document changes in achievement at grade 4 because there were no common items in the two assessments. However, the trends are consistent at the other two grade levels. At grade 7, there were moderate increases in achievement, attitude, and amount of reading. At grade 10 there were no chances in any of these variables.

1.2 Writing

Results suggest that the writing of B.C. students has improved substantially since 1978. Comparisons of the ratings provided by interpretation panels show that the writing of B.C. students today parallels teachers' expectations more closely than it did ten years ago. In 1978 panels rated writing at grade 4 to be "generally satisfactory" (with two weak areas), at grade 8 to be "cause for concern" (with ten weak areas), and at grade 12 to be "extremely disturbing" (with fifteen weak areas). In 1988, all levels of student writing were judged to be satisfactory or better. The 1988 assessment was conducted in grades 4, 7, and 10 while the 1978 assessment was conducted in grades 4, 8, and 12.

Three ratings from 1987 and 1988 offer a sound basis for specific comparisons. In both the 1978 and 1988 assessments, students were rated on expression of a personal opinion, and an extended narrative. In both assessments, the opinion composition was given an overall rating, and the extended narrative was given at least two ratings - one for overall impact, and another for writing mechanics and style. At all grades, the percentage of students attaining acceptable performance ratings has increased substantially. The most dramatic improvements were in the extended narrative.

Figure 1.4
Extended narrative (overall impact):
Writing achievement in 1978 and 1988

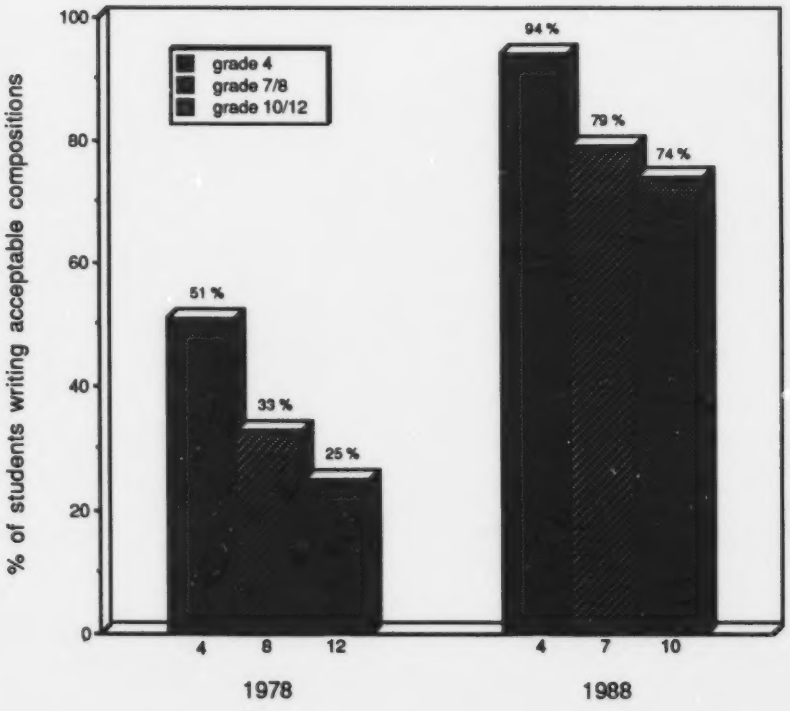


Figure 1.5
Extended narrative (mechanics/style):
Writing achievement in 1978 and 1988

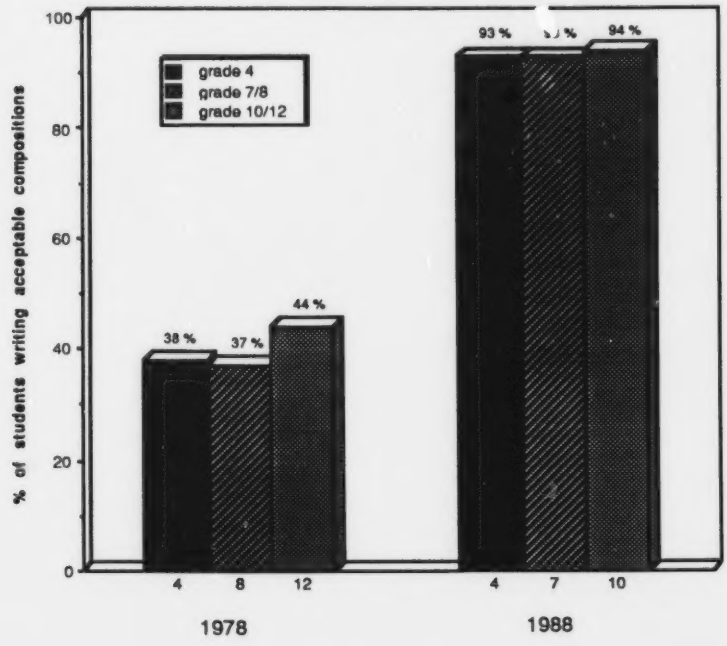
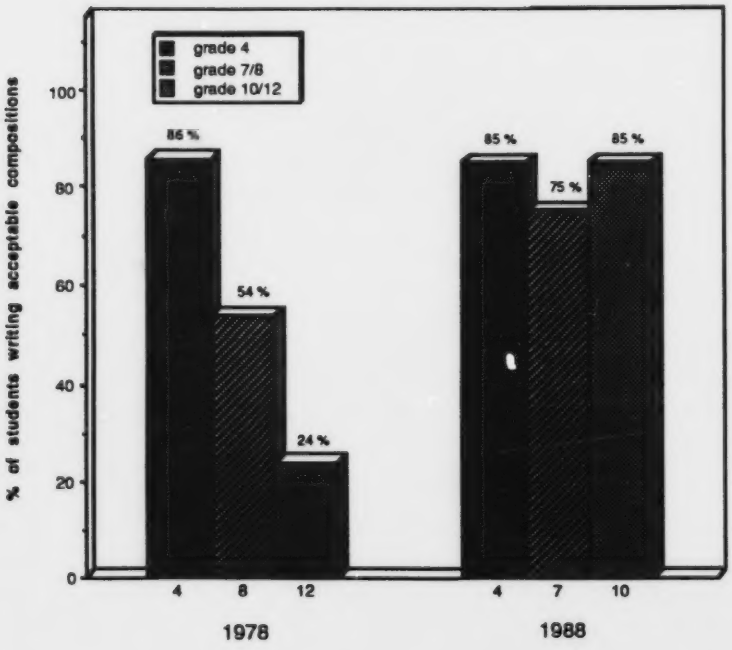


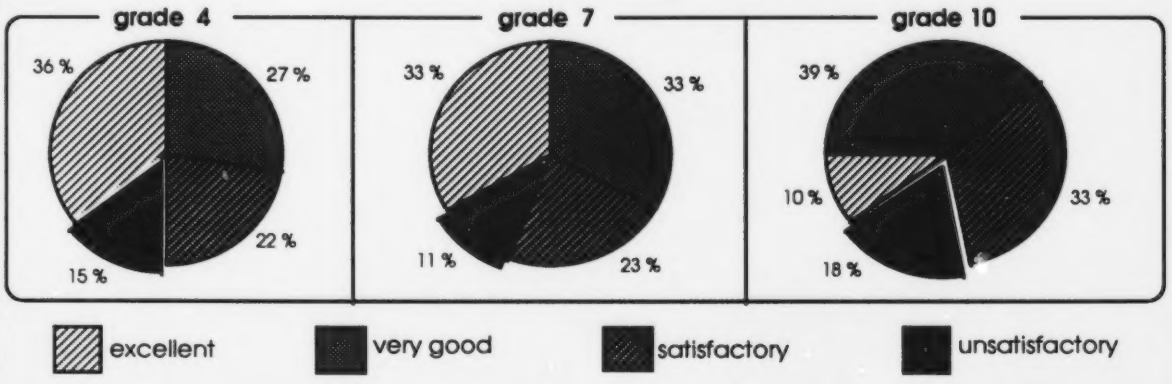
Figure 1.6
Opinion writing:
Writing achievement in 1978 and 1988



Although the procedures and grade levels being assessed are not the same between assessments, the differences in performance are so large that it is obvious that there has been a significant improvement in student writing since 1978. Individuals who were involved in both assessments have indicated that this improvement was evident from the reactions of the markers and panels reviewing the results.

It is difficult to compare attitudes toward writing between 1978 and 1988, but an increase in leisure writing can be inferred. In the 1988 assessment, students reported a great deal of leisure writing, but the majority of students in 1978 reported very few writing activities. In 1988, over 40% of students at all grade levels reported writing two or more letters in the last **month**; in 1978, 60% of grade 8 students and 77% of grade 12 students reported writing two or fewer stories over the past **year**. Furthermore, in 1988, between 18% and 40% of students have written journal entries, stories, or poetry within the past month, and in 1978, aproximately 70% of students, reported **never** writing a diary or journal entry. Again, while the magnitude of the difference is difficult to estimate, it appears that secondary students in 1988 engage in more leisure writing than did their counterparts in 1978.

Figure 2.1
Overall Reading Comprehension:
% of students by levels of competence
(summary of all multiple-choice questions)



Definition of Levels

Excellent:	**The student has achieved a superior level of performance** and has frequently given evidence of outstanding achievement. The student has mastered the goals of the curriculum, is achieving above grade level expectations and is capable of handling advanced levels with ease.
Very Good:	**The student has achieved an above-average level of performance** and occasionally demonstrates a superior level of achievement. The student has mastered most of the goals of the curriculum and is capable of handling more advanced levels without difficulty.
Satisfactory:	Performance at this level ranges from minimally acceptable to fully satisfactory. **The student has achieved the basic goals of the curriculum** at a level which would enable further study at a more advanced level. The weaker students in this category would likely experience some difficulty with study at a more advanced level.
Unsatisfactory:	**The student has failed to achieve the basic goals of the curriculum,** and is not capable of moving to the next level of study. Further study at the student's current level would be advised.

Chapter 2: How Well do B.C. Students Read?

2.1 Overall reading achievement

Students' ability to read a variety of materials with understanding is the key criteria by which reading curricula and instruction are judged. Reading passages used in the assessment reflected the range of materials and the content areas students at various grade levels are expected to be able to deal with in English language arts. Stories, informative articles, essays and poetry were selected from published materials including trade books, newspapers, magazines, and textbooks from other provinces.

Reading performance was evaluated with both multiple-choice and written-response questions. Answers to written-response questions provided additional insights into student reading performance and corroborated the summary results highlighted on the opposite page.

Grade 4: Overall, grade 4 students read well. However, the 15% of students who were unable to reach satisfactory levels of performance are likely to be at some risk as they encounter the increasing reading demands of upper elementary grades.

The ability to understand key ideas and make inferences about stories stand out as particular strengths of grade 4 reading performance. Generally, students found stories the easiest to deal with, and poems the most difficult.

Grade 7: Grade 7 students are able to deal effectively with a variety of reading tasks. Although the 11% of students who read at an unsatisfactory level are a cause for concern, a review of student answers to written-response questions suggests that mediocre results are more often the result of inexperience with the task than with a lack of reading ability. In view of the sound basic reading skills most grade 7 students seem to have acquired during the elementary grades, increased attention to the development of higher level thinking is likely to be rewarding. Attention should also be focussed on the development of reading and responding strategies.

A clear strength at grade 7 is the ability to understand and draw inferences from narrative materials. Many students experience difficulty, however, in dealing with relatively complex information about a scientific discovery, and in evaluating the content of an editorial.

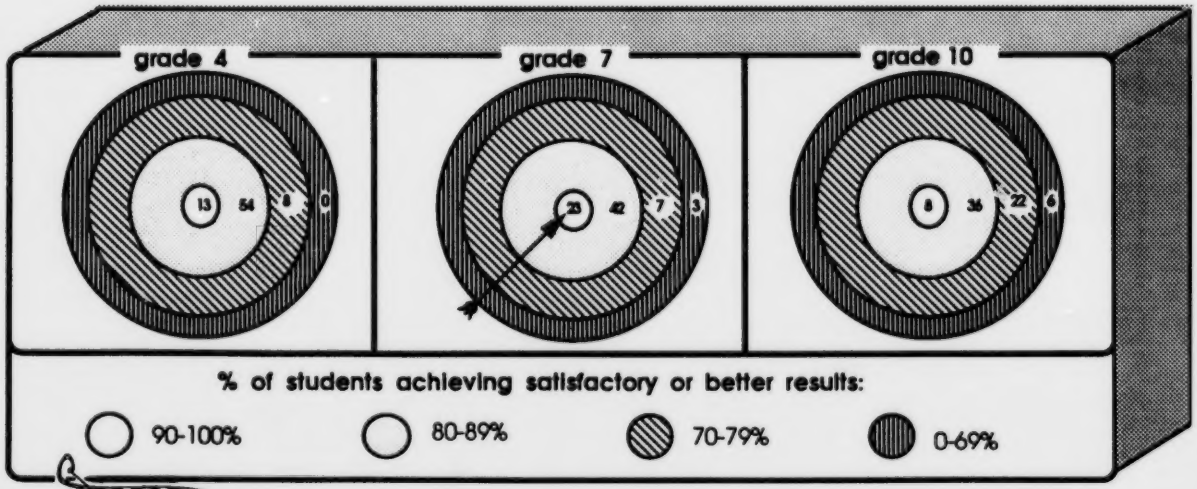
Grade 10: Most grade 10 students were able to deal effectively with the range of reading materials and tasks required in this assessment. The small number of students reaching a superior level for the multiple-choice questions, is balanced by a better performance with the written-response questions. Superior performances were notable in understanding and interpreting poetry. On the other hand, grade 10 students generally had difficulty integrating material from the text in support of their views.

That 18% of grade 10 results were unsatisfactory is somewhat high. Many students were unable to answer inferential or critical questions about one particular science fiction story. This suggests a need to develop strategies for moving from understanding to interpretation and to structuring written responses.

2.2 Differences in achievement between school districts

The percentage of students achieving the basic goals of the curriculum was computed for each district. As shown in the following illustrations, there is a large variation among the results for the 75 B.C. school districts. Each target range is centered on a goal of 90-100% of the students attaining satisfactory achievement. The number of districts falling in each range is specified in the circles. For grade 7, 23 out of 75 districts have more than 90% of their students attaining reading results which are satisfactory or better; there are three districts with fewer than 70% of the students achieving satisfactory results.

Figure 2.2
High reading performance target:
Number of school districts by overall reading performance

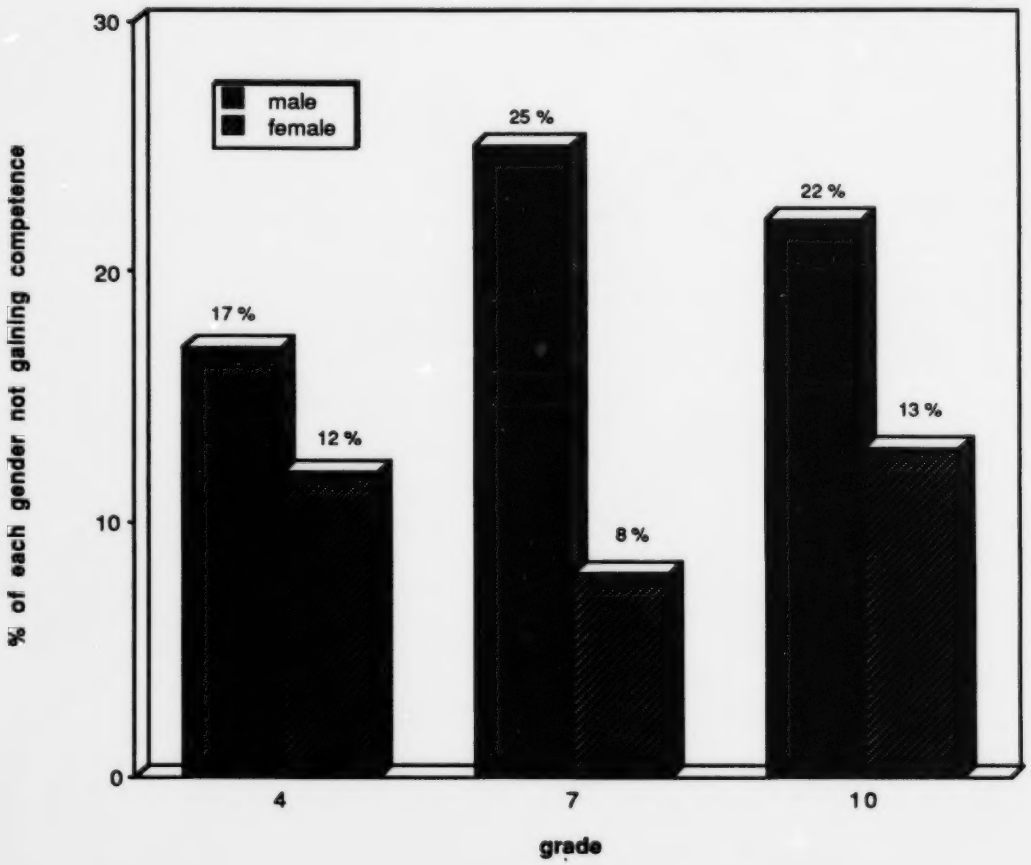


In most districts, over 80% of students have achieved basic curriculum goals for reading comprehension. Generally, results are most variable and least favourable for grade 10. In six school districts, fewer than 70% of grade 10 students demonstrated achievement of basic curriculum goals.

2.3 Gender differences in reading achievement

At all grade levels, female students performed significantly better than their male counterparts and reported greater use of effective reading strategies; they also expressed more positive attitudes. The following graph illustrates the relationship between gender and achievement. It shows the percentage of students who have failed to achieve the basic goals of the curriculum. At grade 7, the percentage of males who have failed to achieve the basic goals of the curriculum is three times that for females.

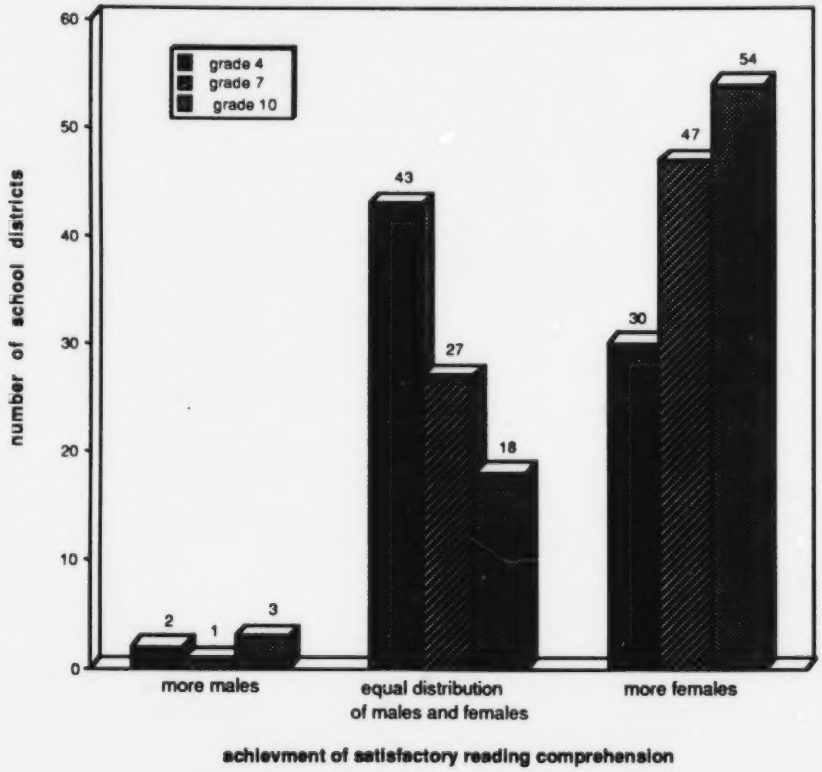
Figure 2.3
Unsatisfactory reading performance by gender



Overall, the weaker reading performance of male students is cause for concern. An attempt must be made to develop programs that will encourage higher performance by male students.

Within the 75 school districts, however, there are marked differences in performance by gender. The percentage of males and females achieving satisfactory results were computed for each district. The following graph shows the number of districts in which there is an equal percentage of males and females achieving satisfactory results. The number of districts with more females, and the number of districts with more males achieving satisfactory results are also plotted.
(Equal distribution was defined as a difference of 5% or less.)

Figure 2.4
Gender equity in school districts
(Satisfactory or better reading performances)



The provincial results show a stronger reading performance by females. However, several districts report equal numbers of male and female students achieving satisfactory reading performances. A few districts even show higher reading performance for their male students. These results indicate that gender equity in reading performance is possible.

2.4 Relationship between reading achievement and reading habits

The amount of leisure reading students reported doing was positively related both to achievement and to attitude. Students who seek out reading materials, and spend a great deal of their free time reading express more positive attitudes and show higher reading achievement scores. The following graphs show the trend in achievement by leisure reading activities. The general trend is similar for all grades but differences between those who read a great deal and those who do not become larger as students move from elementary to secondary school.

Figure 2.5
Reading achievement*
by number of library books borrowed

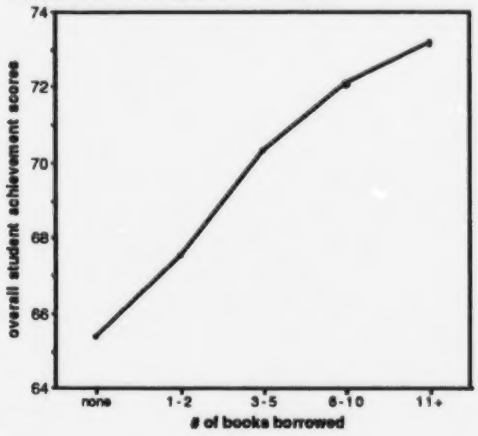
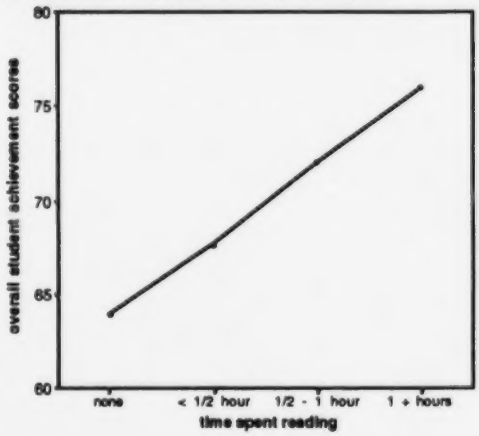


Figure 2.6
Reading achievement*
by amount of time spent reading "yesterday"



The following graphs show the differences in achievement between students who have access to a great deal of reading material in their homes or at school, and those who have little or none.

Figure 2.7
Reading achievement*
by number of books in the home

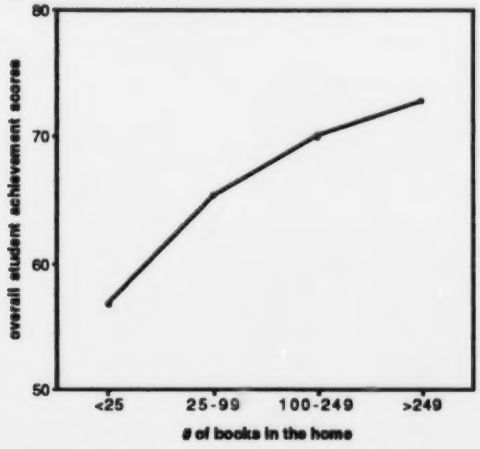
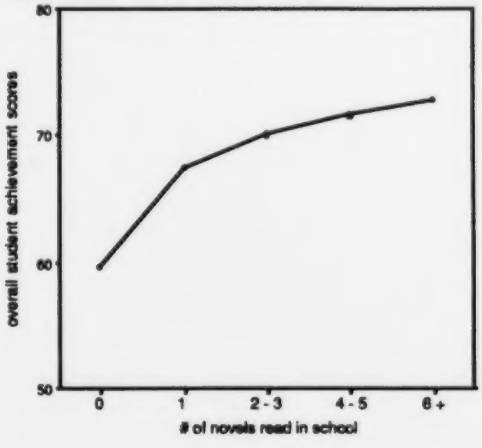


Figure 2.8
Reading achievement*
by number of novels read in school



*Overall reading achievement is a summative rating representing grades 4, 7, and 10 combined.

2.5 Which students are the better readers?

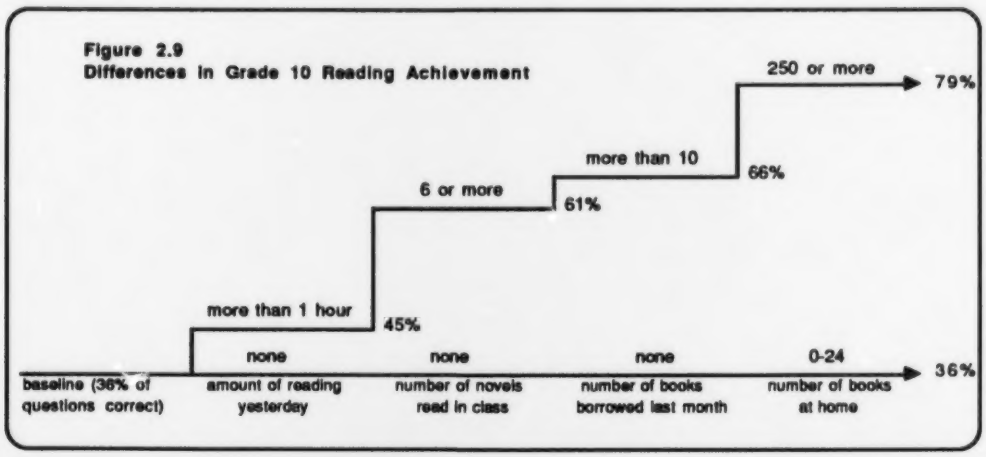
Student answers to the four questions presented in Figure 2.10 can be used to predict reading scores. Base reading scores for each grade level are given along the bottom of the table. A student's predicted score is obtained by adding four values to this base score. The points to be added depend on the answers to the four questions. The following procedure can be used to calculate a student's predicted score:

- identify the answer to the first question
- locate the point value under the appropriate grade column beside the selected answer.
- add this point value to the base score.
- repeat these steps for the other three questions.

The lowest predicted scores for each grade level are for students who select the last response to each question. The predicted scores for these students are the base scores because zero is added for each response. The highest predicted scores are for students who select the first response for each question. For grade 4, the highest point value for the third question is assigned to the second response. The lowest and highest predicted scores are given below for each grade level:

	Lowest Score	Highest Score
Grade 4	47%	80%
Grade 7	50%	82%
Grade 10	36%	79%

The separation is considerably larger at grade 10 than at the lower grades. The following illustration for grade 10 shows the separation between achievement for students selecting the first response and students selecting the last response for each question.



Similar patterns are observed for students in grades 4 and 7, but the differences are smaller.

Figure 2.10
Predicting a Student's Reading Score

Add to Base Reading Score* (percent)			Question
Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10	
			How much time did you spend reading for your own pleasure yesterday?
9	10	9	❑ More than one hour.
6	6	6	❑ Between half an hour and one hour.
2	2	3	❑ Less than half an hour.
0	0	0	❑ None.
			How many novels have you read in your English class this year?
7	5	16	❑ Six or more.
7	5	14	❑ Four or five.
7	3	13	❑ Two or three.
5	1	11	❑ One.
0	0	0	❑ None.
			About how many library books did you borrow last month?
4	3	5	❑ More than ten.
6	3	4	❑ Six to ten.
5	2	3	❑ Three to five.
2	1	2	❑ One or two.
0	0	0	❑ None.
			About how many books are there in your home?
11	14	13	❑ 250 or more.
11	12	11	❑ 100 to 249.
7	8	7	❑ 25 to 99.
0	0	0	❑ 0 to 24.
47%	50%	36%	Base reading score (Percentage of questions correct)

*The point values were obtained by a regression analysis. Predicted scores obtained from these data represent the average for all students who have a specified pattern of responses to the four questions.

Figure 3.1
Components of Reading Performance

The following areas of reading comprehension were measured in the reading assessment.

1. Recognition (Literal Comprehension)

Literal comprehension refers to the ability to grasp information which is explicitly stated; little analysis, translation, or evaluation is required. The following is a question that measures literal comprehension:

How would David know he was allowed to come home?

A. If a white cloth was tied on the cherry tree.
B. If his mother answered his letter immediately.
C. If he saw a white cloth tied on the apple tree.
D. If his father wore a white shirt at the train station.

2. Interpretation (Inferential Comprehension)

Inferential comprehension refers to the ability to understand and interpret implicit meaning through mental operations such as making predictions, synthesizing, reorganizing, translating, generalizing, interpreting relationships, or drawing conclusions. Questions such as the following gauge students' ability to make inferences from the information provided:

Why has the author referred to David as a 'driftwood of a youth'?

A. David has a chip on his shoulder.
B. David is thin.
C. David has been moving from place to place.
D. David is bitter toward life.

3. Evaluation (Critical Comprehension)

Critical comprehension refers to the ability to evaluate or make judgments about what is read in such terms as purpose, validity, relevance or technique. Questions on critical comprehension asked students to identify the author's purpose or attitude, to distinguish between fact and opinion as well as between relevant an irrelevant information, to evaluate conclusions based on passage information, and to recognize authors' strategies. For example, the following question measures ability to evaluate the author's purpose:

In this story, how do you think the author intended you to feel toward David?

A. Sympathetic.
B. Envious.
C. Disgusted.
D. Resentful.

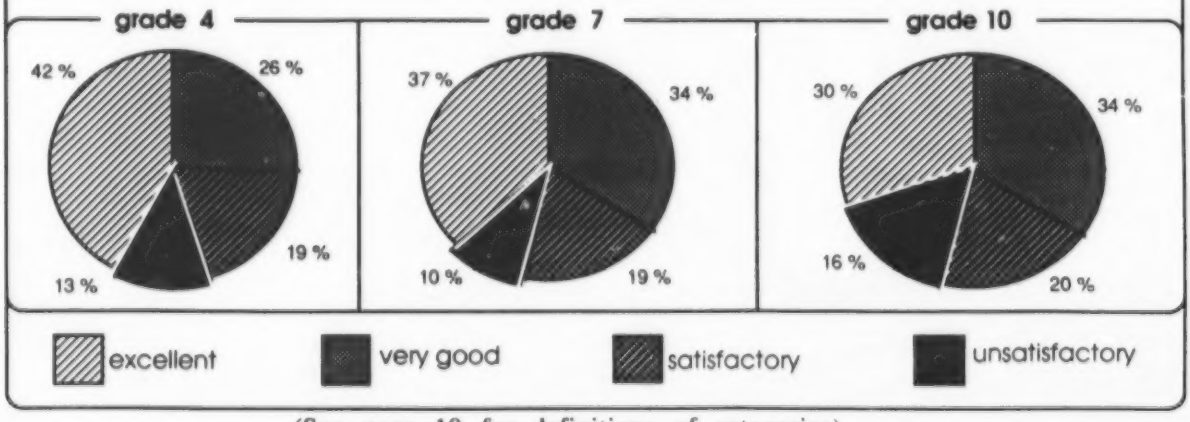
Chapter 3: Ways of Perceiving What is Read

Reading performance has been broken down into three levels of comprehension as described in B.C. curriculum guides: explicit understanding or "literal" comprehension, interpretive or "inferential" comprehension, and evaluative or "critical" comprehension. These levels are defined on the previous page.

3.1 How well do B.C. students recognize basic information in what they read?

At all levels, B.C. students appear to be meeting basic curriculum requirements in terms of reading and understanding material which is explicitly stated. As the following graphs show, over 65% of all students achieve very good or excellent levels of competence in this area.

Figure 3.2
Literal Comprehension:
% of students by levels of competence
(summary of multiple-choice questions)



(See page 10 for definitions of categories)

Grade 4: Grade 4 students experience little difficulty understanding explicit information; 87% of the students achieve the basic goals of the curriculum. The percentage of students answering any one item correctly range from 55% to 92%. In general, narratives and informative articles cause the least difficulty, and those questions dealing with poetry are most often answered incorrectly.

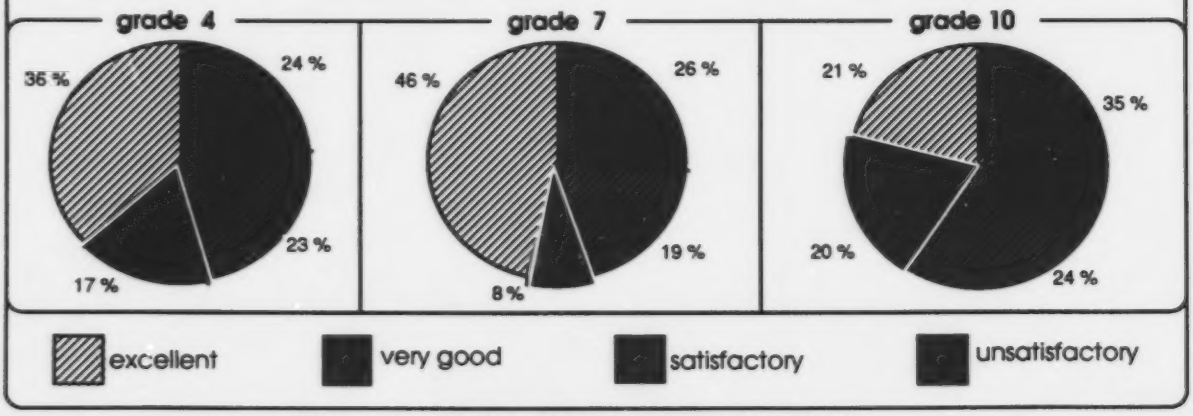
Grade 7: Ninety percent of grade 7 students meet the basic curriculum requirements for literal comprehension. Individual questions are correctly answered from 57% to 95% of the time. Students perform particularly well on questions about narrative passages. They have slightly more difficulty dealing with a newspaper article based on science content.

Grade 10: Raters felt that grade 10 students should demonstrate facility in understanding information which is directly stated. Therefore, the more than 15% of students who do not attain competence in this area are a particular concern. Correct answers to individual questions range from 49% to 89%.

3.2 How well do B.C. students interpret what they read?

Results for multiple-choice questions displayed in the graphs which follow support the interpretation that B.C. students are able to meet basic curriculum requirements in terms of their abilities to make inferences about what they read.

Figure 3.3
Inferential Comprehension:
% of students by levels of competence
(summary of multiple-choice questions)

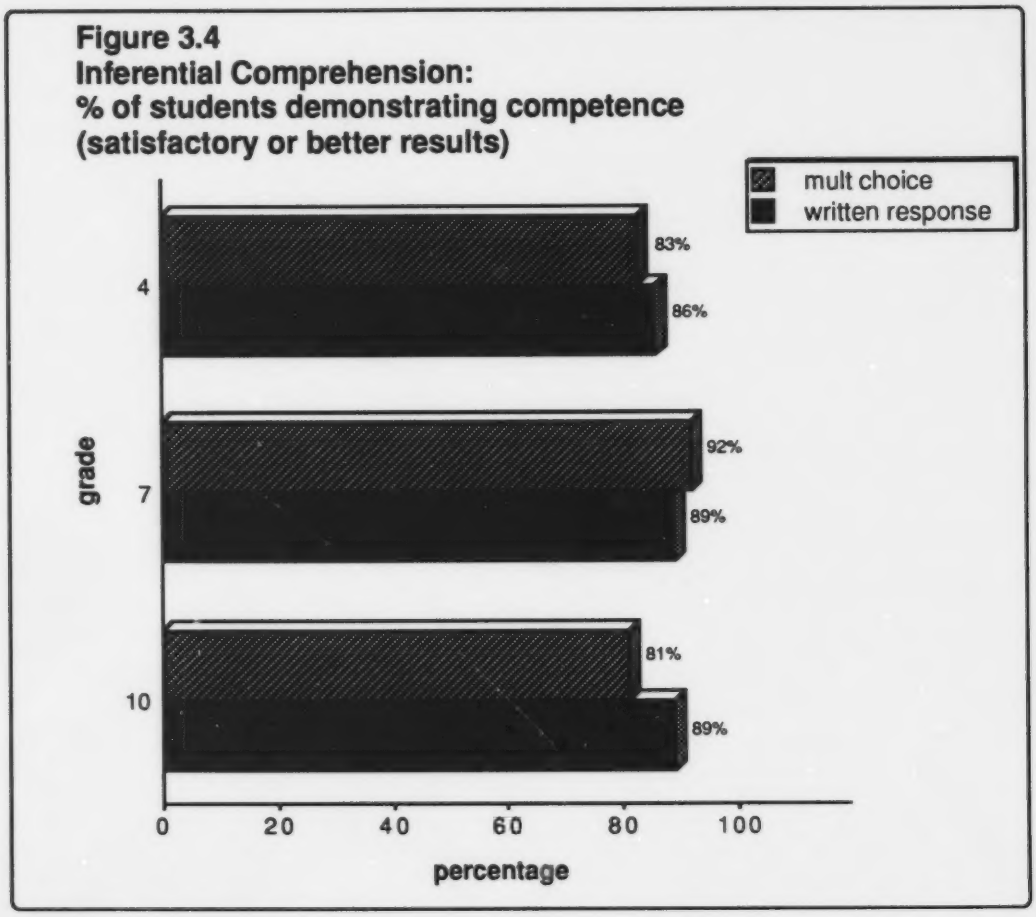


(See page 10 for definitions of categories)

That almost 20% of the grade 4 and grade 10 students do not meet satisfactory levels on the multiple-choice questions is cause for concern. These students are likely to be at some risk as they encounter the increasing reading demands of higher grades. The reading problems of these students present a clear challenge to all levels of the education system.

Students' responses to a series of written-response questions provide additional insights into their inferential reading skills. These questions were scored using descriptive scales indicating levels of competence.

Figure 3.4
Inferential Comprehension:
% of students demonstrating competence
(satisfactory or better results)



Grade 4: At grade 4, students provide substantial elaboration and evidence of logical thought, although results vary dramatically from one item to another. For example, over 95% of students provide satisfactory responses to questions which ask them to make inferences about a story character and predict the outcome. On the other hand, only 38% of students are able to interpret an extended metaphor in a poem.

Grade 7: Performance at grade 7, where approximately 90% of students are judged to meet basic program goals is particularly encouraging. As in grade 4, grade 7 student performance is particularly impressive on those questions associated with the narrative passages.

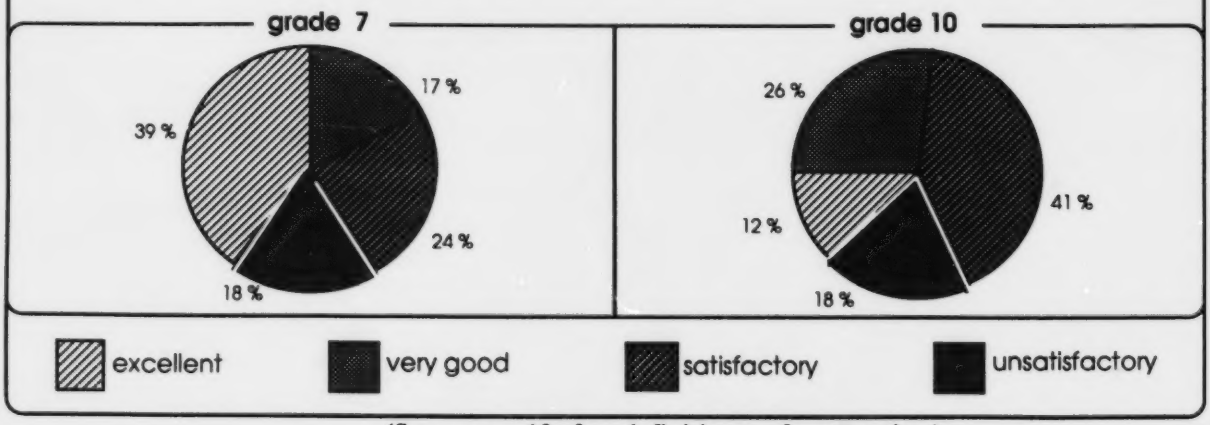
Grade 10: At grade 10, the distribution of results indicates both few inadequate responses and few superior responses. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that between 5% and 10% of students fail to provide adequate responses because they do not make a serious effort in responding to assessment instruments.

3.3 How good are B.C. students at evaluating what they read?

Results suggest that while most students are able to meet the basic or minimum critical comprehension goals of the B.C. language arts curriculum, some tasks elicited few "superior" responses.

A review of multiple-choice questions shows that a main area of strength lies in the ability of grade 10 students to analyze poetry. The main area of weakness is in the difficulty that grade 7 students experienced in making personal judgements about an editorial on prejudice.

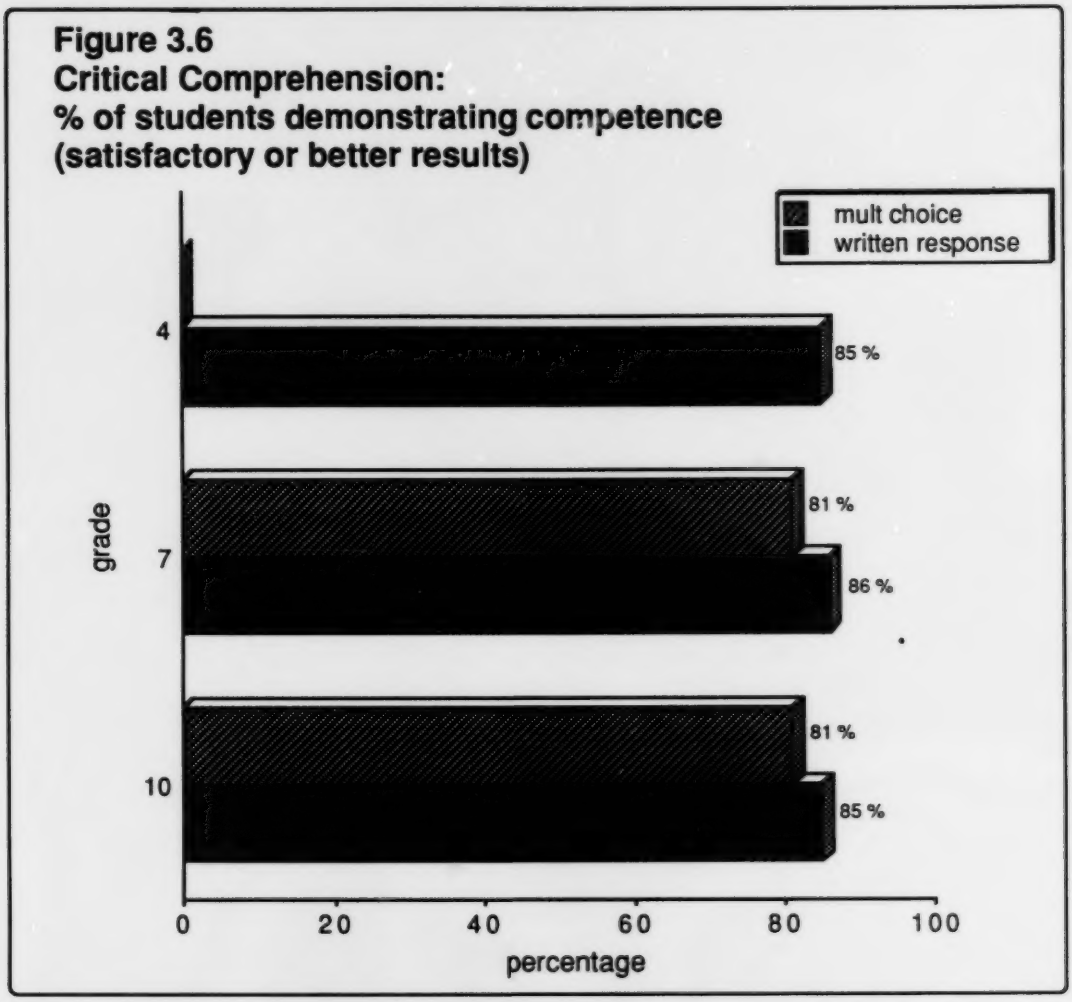
Figure 3.5
Critical Comprehension:
% of students by levels of competence
(summary of multiple-choice items)



(See page 10 for definitions of categories.)

Because grade 4 students were given few multiple-choice questions in this area, a summary of the written-response questions provides the most informative comparison of critical comprehension results.

Figure 3.6
Critical Comprehension:
% of students demonstrating competence
(satisfactory or better results)



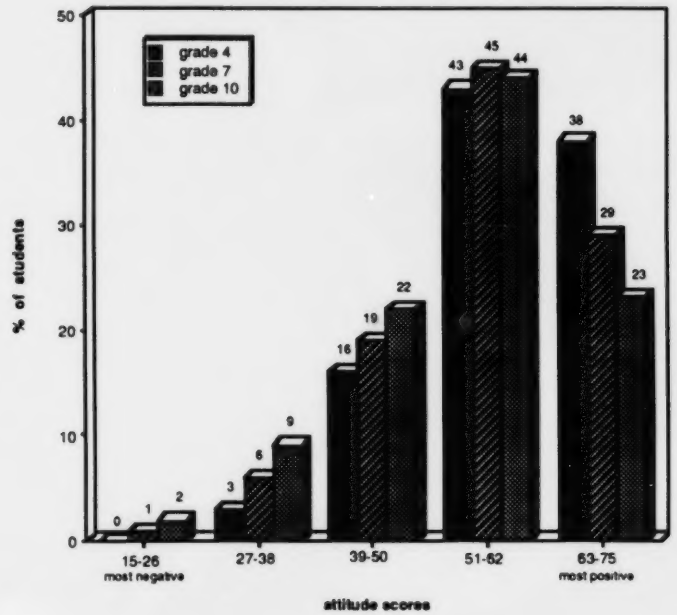
For all grades, students could infer the purpose or attitudes of the author, and a large number did so with superior responses. However, many students had particular difficulties stating and substantiating their personal opinions. Few students were able to address these tasks with sophistication, insight, or elaboration. At grade 4, one third of the students received an unsatisfactory rating for questions requiring substantiation of an opinion; at grades 7 and 10, approximately half of the students did not satisfactorily complete similar tasks.

Chapter 4: Attitudes Toward Reading

One important outcome of a successful reading program is that students value and enjoy reading - that they express positive opinions and seek out independent reading experiences. At all grade levels, students responded to the **Estes Reading Attitude Survey** as well as to a series of questions about the nature and extent of their independent reading experiences.

B.C. students at all grade levels expressed positive attitudes toward reading. The following graph shows the distribution of students by total attitude score.

Figure 4.1
Estes Reading Attitude Survey results
(scaled groupings of total scores)



Eighty-one percent of grade 4 students; 74% of grade 7 students, and 67% of grade 10 students expressed positive attitudes.

Positive attitudes were also revealed by students' reported reading habits. At grade 4, 96% of the students reported borrowing library books during the past month and 80% spent free time reading on the previous day. At grade 7, 90% borrowed library books an 80% spent free time reading. At grade 10, 69% of the students borrowed library books during the past month, and 73% reported reading in their free time.

Figure 5.1
Writing Achievement:
Definition of levels

Extended Narrative	Description	Opinion
Desirable: Papers are generally clear and focussed with some instances of originality or individuality. Interesting or engaging ideas are developed through detail, explanation, or example. There is a sense of voice. Writers demonstrate control of sentence structure and vocabulary, and, while there may be some mechanical errors, these do not interfere with comprehension.	**Desirable:** An interesting or engaging image is conveyed through the use of logically ordered details. A personal voice is evident and writers often convey their feelings about the object described. There is a sense of structure and completion. Language is precise and vivid, and there are few mechanical errors.	**Desirable:** The writer's opinion or position is clearly stated, an argument is developed through reasons and examples, and an explicit conclusion is offered. There is evidence of some sophistication and insight. There may be minor mechanical problems but these do not interfere with comprehension.
Minimally acceptable: Papers are generally clear and focussed but there are few instances of individuality. There is little evidence of sophistication in thought or language, and development may be naive or incomplete. Writers demonstrate control of basic sentence structures and vocabulary, but mechanical errors may detract from effectiveness.	**Minimally acceptable:** The writer attempts to create an image and succeeds in conveying at least a vague impression. Detail may be lacking, or presented as an ordered list of qualities. Language tends to be imprecise and may be colloquial, repetitive, or trite. There may be errors in usage and syntax..	**Minimally acceptable:** The writer's position is apparent but the argument is weak. The paper may be unfocussed, and the conclusion may be illogical, irrelevant, or missing. Supporting examples and reasons are often incomplete, or immature, and their relationship to the writer's position is often unclear. There may be problems with spelling, usage, and sentence structure.
Unsatisfactory: Papers have little or no sense of purpose, structure and development. Content is thin and often difficult to follow, and there is no sense of voice. Sentences tend to be simple, repetitive, and contain frequent errors in usage and problems with idiom. Vocabulary is limited and may be inappropriate. Severe and repeated mechanical errors interfere with the reader's comprehension.	**Unsatisfactory:** The writer fails to convey an image. There is little sense of focus or structure and even the topic may be unclear. Few relevant details are presented. Vocabulary is limited, and often inappropriate or inaccurate. The writing frequently contains serious errors of usage and syntax which interfere with meaning. The reader is left confused.	**Unsatisfactory:** The writing is immature and illogical. There is little sense of focus and the writer may not directly address the topic. Ideas are not developed (alternately, development may be extremely confusing). Problems with spelling, usage, and sentence structure interfere with comprehension. The reader is left confused.

Chapter 5: How Well Do B.C. Students Write?

5.1 Overall achievement in written expression

Almost all B.C. students write well enough to meet basic curriculum expectations. Students exhibit a strong engagement with their topics, effective generation of ideas, and remarkable fluency. Writing at grade 10 was particularly strong in the areas of personal content and honesty.

Although there was some consistency in the overall impact of student writing, the quality varied substantially between different topics and forms. The key factor in judging the effectiveness of a writing program is the skill with which students' complete a variety of writing tasks. This assessment examined students' writing ability in three areas:

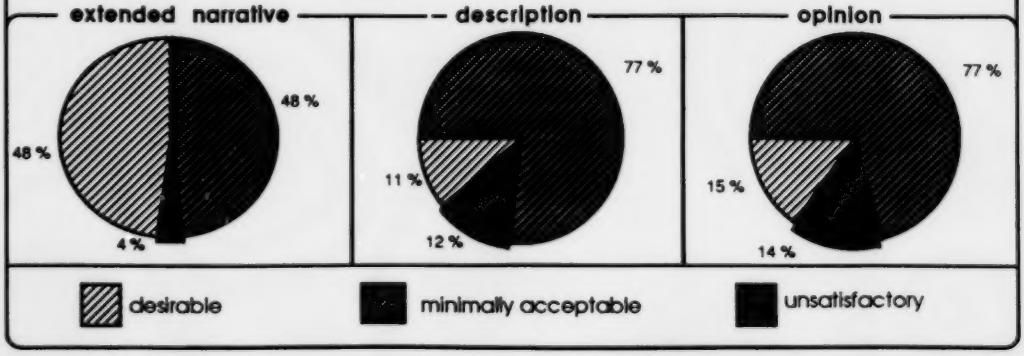
- Composing an extended narrative from personal experience or imagination.
- Presenting and substantiating an opinion in response to a specific issue.
- Describing an object.

All compositions were rated using holistic scales. The extended narrative was also rated on three analytic scales. Separate scales were generated for each grade level. Elements from those scales have been used to describe the three levels of performance identified on the previous page. The "desirable" level reflects proficiency in tasks related to the curriculum goals. "Minimally acceptable" reflects achievement of the basic goals of the curriculum.

5.2 Grade 4 writing performance

Over 85% of the compositions were judged to be at least minimally acceptable in terms of overall quality. Grade 4 students performed better on the extended writing task, than on the shorter pieces where both form and topics were specified. Nearly half of the student's extended compositions were judged to be superior. This dropped to 15% and 11% for the shorter compositions.

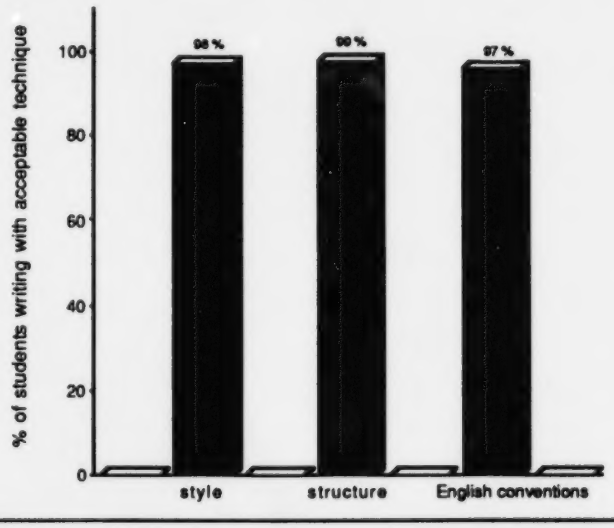
Figure 5.2
Grade 4: Writing Achievement
% of students by levels of competence



For the extended narrative, 96% of students wrote papers judged to have met basic goals of the curriculum. Students' fluency was described as a particular strength - most students appeared to have no difficulty generating ideas and writing at length on the topics provided.

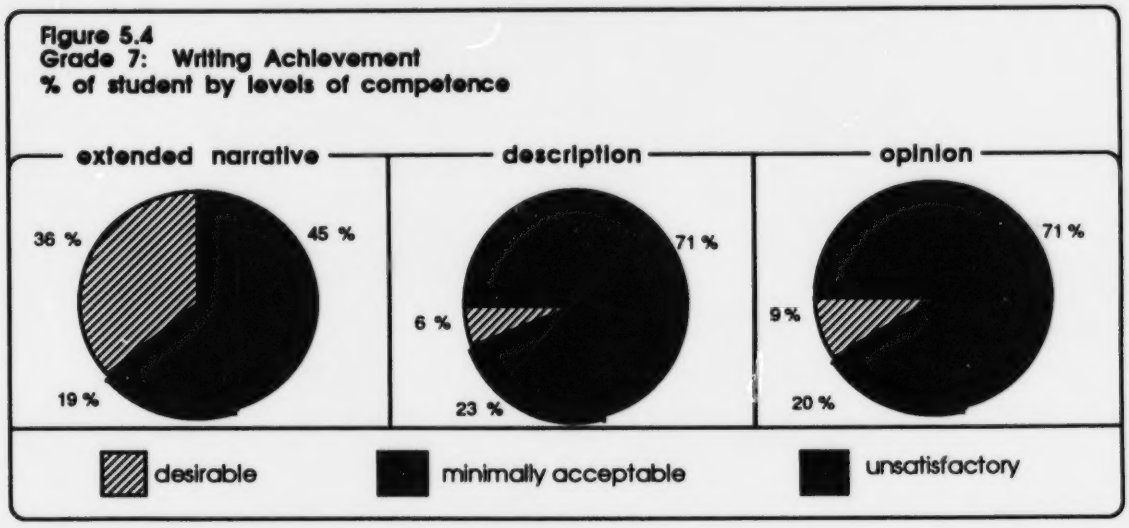
The extended narrative was also marked for specific features of writing technique. Over 95% of grade 4 students met minimum expectations for writing style, structure, and English conventions.

Figure 5.3
Grade 4: Writing technique
% of students attaining minimally acceptable or better scores

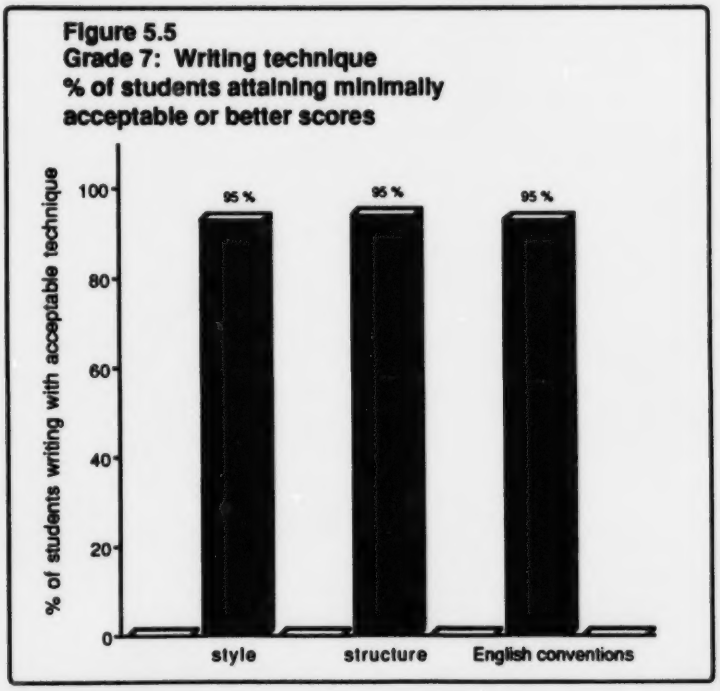


5.3 Grade 7 writing performance

Over 75% of the compositions were judged to be at least minimally acceptable in terms of overall quality. Again, students performed better on the extended task which allowed more latitude in terms of form and content than on the more structured description and opinion tasks. While more than 1/3 of the grade 7 students wrote extended compositions at a desirable level, less than 10% attained this level for opinion and description writing.



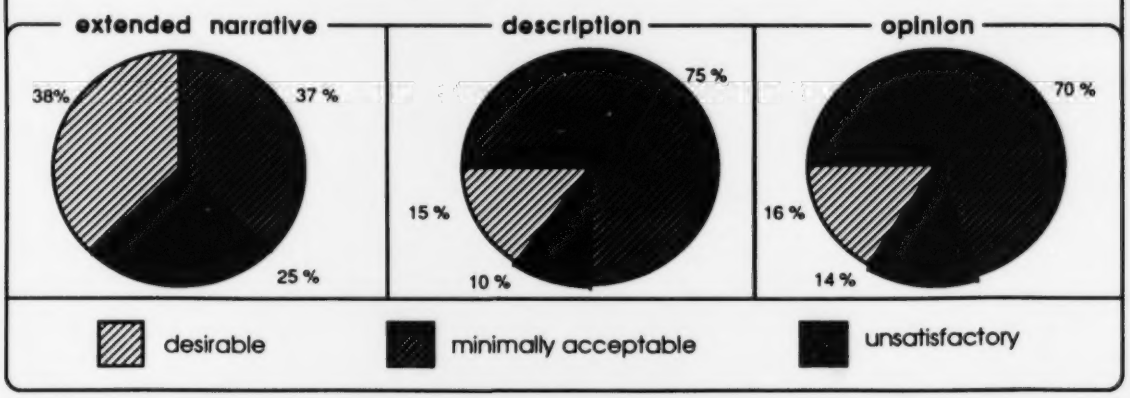
Generally, teachers noted that they were pleased with the percentage of acceptable compositions, but disappointed that more students did not produce desirable papers. Raters were impressed by the overall quality of grade 7 writing, and noted strengths in fluency, in engagement with the topics, in unity and the use of transitions, and in spelling and punctuation. They expressed some concern about the number of papers which gave limited evidence of careful planning or attention to a sense of audience. They also noted specific problems with diction and with pronoun use. Like the grade 4 students, almost all grade 7 students received satisfactory ratings for the specific technical aspects of style, structure, and English conventions.



5.4 Grade 10 writing performance

Three quarters of the grade 10 students provided responses judged as minimally acceptable or better for the extended writing task; 38% reached or exceeded the criteria for "desirable" writing. On the shorter writing tasks, approximately 85% of papers were at least minimally acceptable; 15% met or exceeded the criteria for "desirable" writing. As many as 25% of students did not write minimally acceptable responses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many grade 10 students did not take the assessment tasks seriously. This suggests that strategies must be developed at the high school level to increase students' sense of accountability for provincial assessment tasks if the results are to be valid.

Figure 5.6
Grade 10: Writing Achievement
% of students by levels of competence

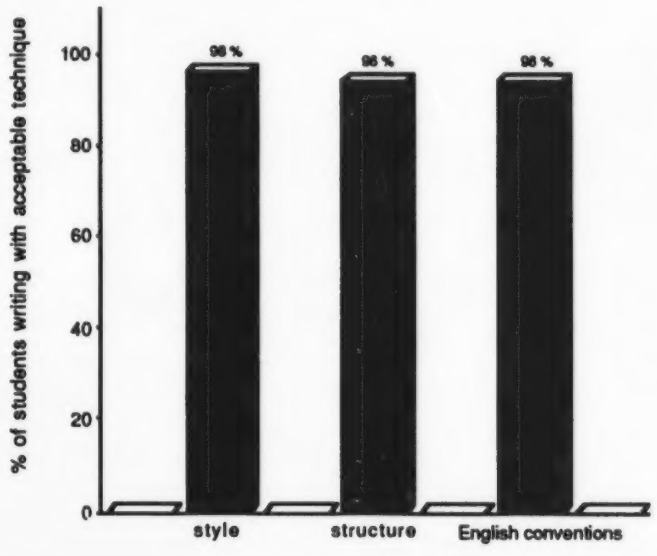


Raters were impressed by the extent of "honesty" and personal commitment in many of the papers, and noted fluency, unity, mechanics and the use of dialogue as overall strengths. On the other hand, grade 10 writing exhibited a lack of sentence variety, absence of figurative and evocative language, and poor elaboration of ideas. These weaknesses indicate a need for increased collaborative activities both as a means of helping students to develop and extend their ideas before writing and to evaluate and edit their own work.

Raters expressed concern that many of the compositions were modelled on movies and television shows, mirroring the simplistic - and often violent - plot lines, but failing to evoke visual imagery. They suggested that students be encouraged to draw on literary models for their own writing. Also, they expressed concern about the extent of social and emotional problems students revealed in their writing.

Like the younger students, almost all grade 10 students scored satisfactory ratings for specific techniques.

Figure 5.7
Grade 10: Writing technique
% of students attaining minimally acceptable or better scores



5.5 Characteristics of Superior Writing

After initial scoring was completed, a team of teachers analyzed a sample of papers in terms of salient features or characteristics which appeared to be associated with superior writing. These analyses were undertaken to provide direction for the development of instructional resources and strategies.

At grade 4, opinion-writing was distinguished by a sense of focus and of logical organization. The features of extended writing which were consistently associated with higher overall or holistic ratings included:

- elaboration through effective use of detail.
- economy in the writing.
- a sense of voice and energy.
- use of visual and connotative language.
- sentence variety and innovative opening sentences.
- effective personal narrative.

At grades 7 and 10, higher scores for both opinion and extended narratives were characterized by a sustained voice or tone, a sense of economy, and the effective use of repetition. Superior narratives for these grades tended to include the following features:

- effective use of dialogue.
- visual detail.
- clearly established setting.
- resolution of the problem or goal.

Superior opinion papers at grades 7 and 10 offered:

- effective use of connotative language and repetition.
- an appeal based on logic.
- several reasons for the position taken.
- alternatives to the course of action suggested in the prompt.
- a concluding summary or restatement.

Effective description writing at grades 4 and 7, but not at grade 10, showed evidence of explicit pre-writing. On the other hand, the presence of a thesis statement was associated with effective descriptive writing at grade 10, but not at grades 4 and 7. At all grades, effective descriptive writing was characterized by:

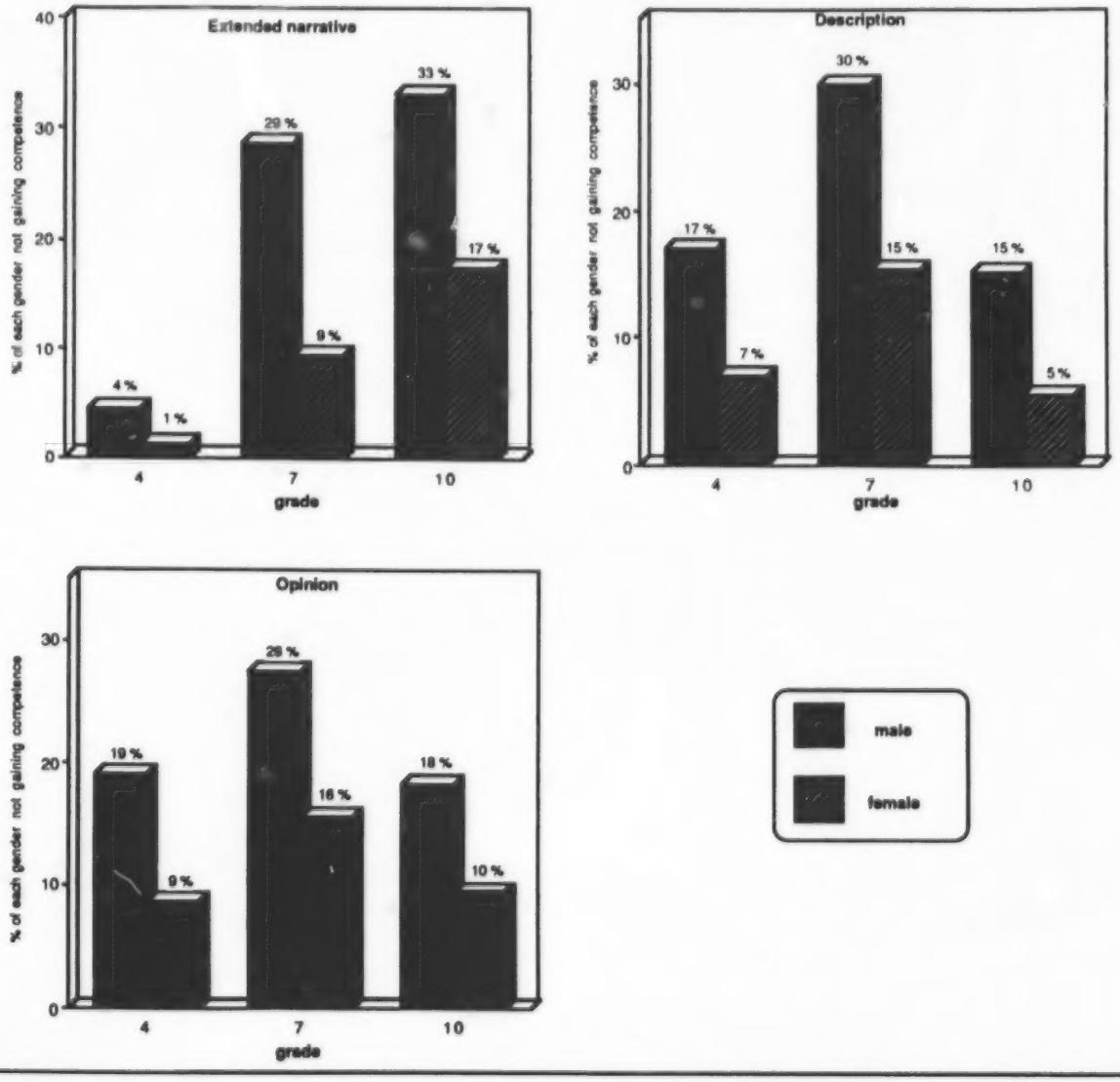
- a natural flow of ideas.
- elaboration through extensive detail.
- a sustained voice or tone.
- sensory language.
- a high level of specificity in vocabulary.
- a sense of audience distinguished.

Superior writing at all grades and on all tasks displayed variations in level of generality - statements and ideas moved between general and specific, rather than focusing exclusively at one level. See Appendix B for examples of superior student writing.

5.6 Gender differences in writing performance

One goal of the B.C. learning assessment program is to identify factors which appear to enhance or detract from performance. This information can provide a context for interpreting results, and suggest directions for changes in instructional programs and practices. The relationship between gender and writing achievement is illustrated in the following graphs which show the percentage of female and male students who wrote compositions judged to be unsatisfactory. At all grade levels, more male students write at unsatisfactory levels.

Figure 5.8
Unsatisfactory writing performance by gender

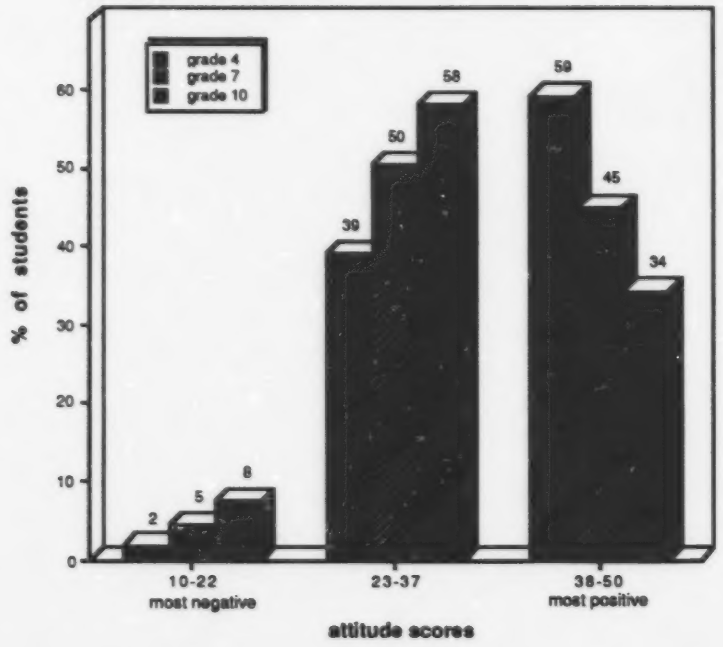


Chapter 6: Attitudes Toward Writing

Students who enjoy writing tend to be good writers. Writing performance scores were positively related to attitude scores, to opinions about the value of writing, and to the amount of leisure or "voluntary" writing. Therefore, one important outcome of an effective writing program is that students enjoy and value writing - that they express positive opinions and seek out independent writing experiences in their free time.

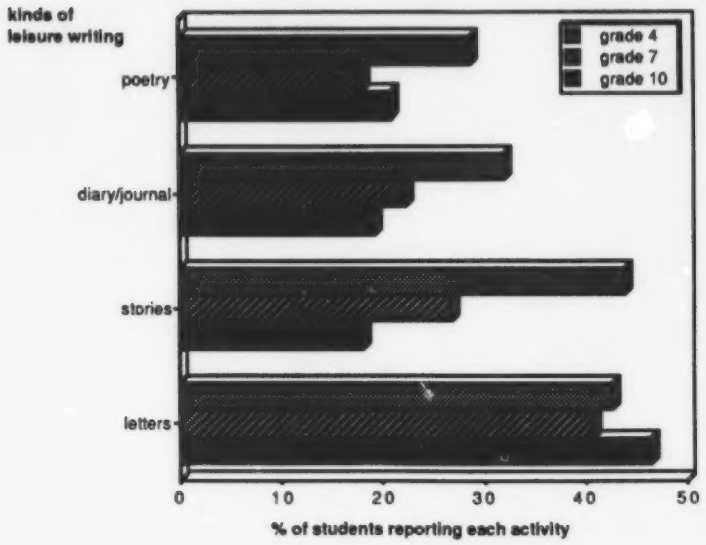
Overall, B.C. students expressed positive attitudes toward writing. They reported that writing is important for success both in and out of school, for communicating to others, and for understanding their own feelings. Over 80% of students at all grade levels feel that writing skills can help to get a job. 70-80% of all students value writing as a tool to organize, understand, and communicate ideas. Over 60% of students report that writing is important to help understand and share their feelings. These results are detailed in Appendix C.

Figure 6.1
Writing Attitude Survey results
(scaled groupings of total scores)



Grade 4 students reported the most positive attitudes and the greatest amount of writing. Over 40% of all grade levels reported writing two or more letters in the last month, and between 18% and 40% have written two journal entries, two stories or two poems.

Figure 6.2
Leisure writing activities
(practiced at least twice in the last month)



The availability of books in the home is strongly associated with attitudes and writing proficiency. At all grades, writing achievement scores were highest among those who reported having over 250 books in their homes. Scores were lowest among students who reported fewer than 25 books in their homes. The differences between students with large and small numbers of books at home increased with increasing grade level. The relationship between books-at-home and achievement is illustrated in the following graphs.

Figure 6.3
Writing competence by number of books in the nome

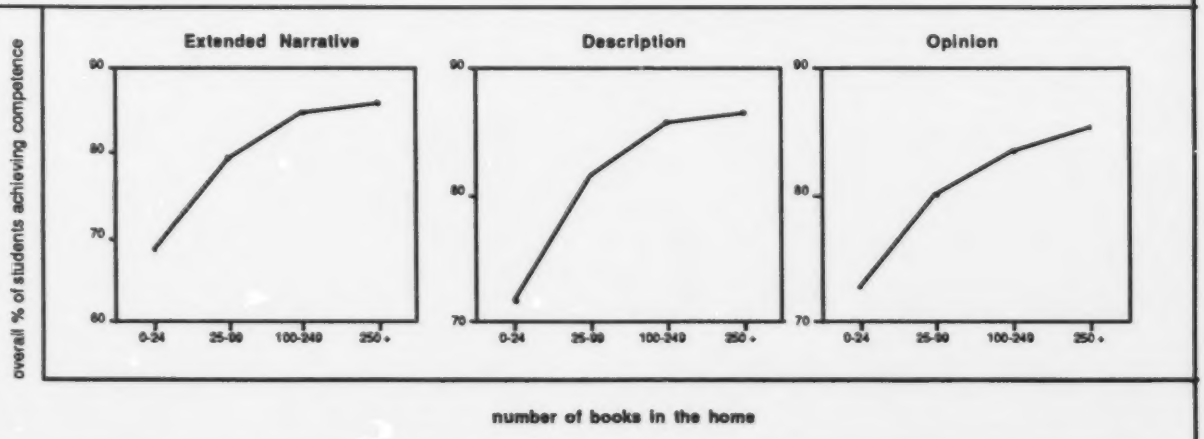
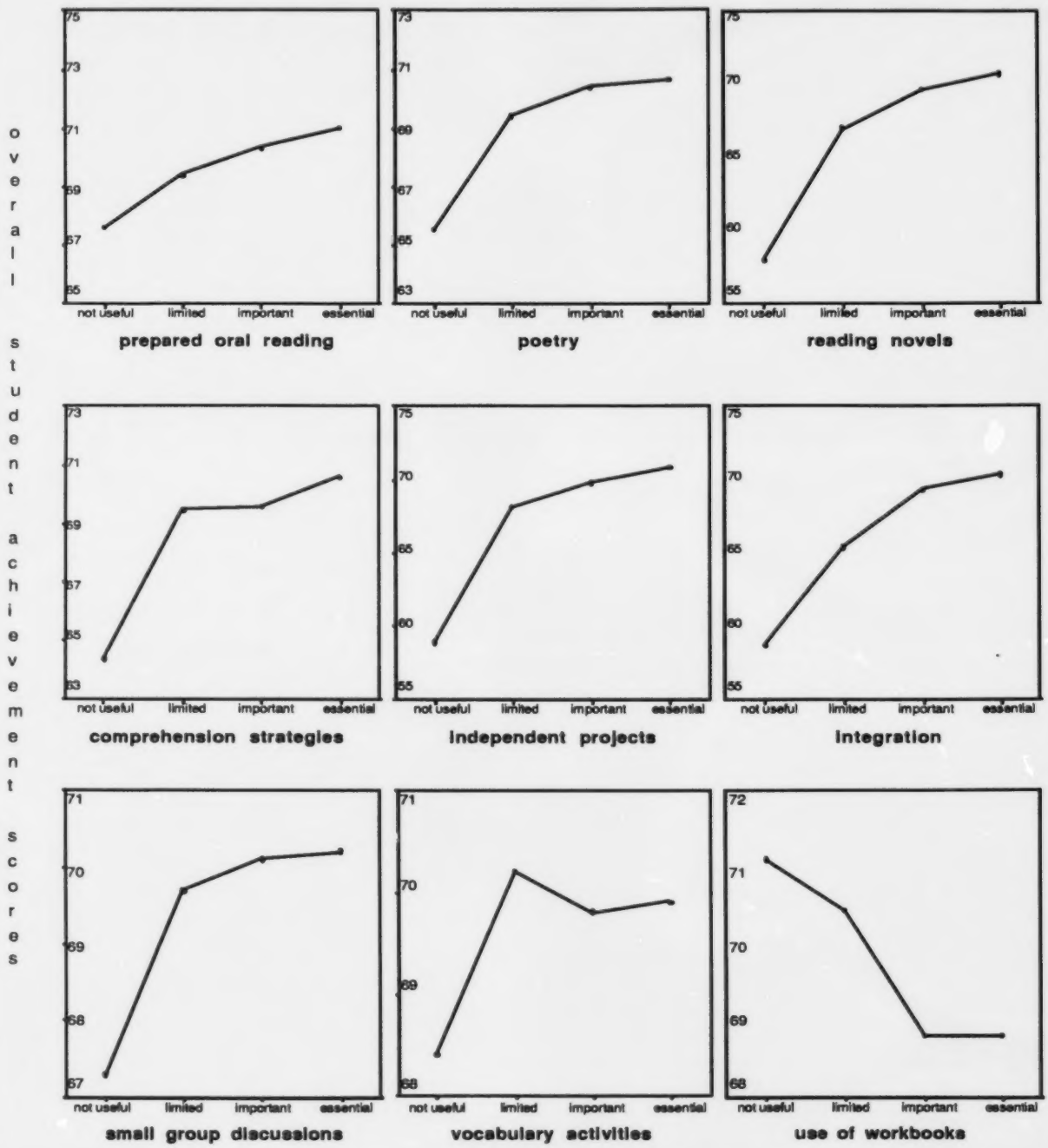


Figure 7.1
Overall student achievement scores
by importance given to various program features



Chapter 7: How do Programs Promote Reading Performance?

One of the major goals of the B.C. reading assessment is to evaluate student performance in terms of curriculum requirements, as well as to identify program features which appear to enhance or detract from performance.

7.1 Program features

Teachers indicated the importance of a variety of program features and materials to their language arts programs. Results show that some B.C. curriculum features are not being taught consistently by all teachers. The greatest disparity is found in the area of poetry. Only 46% of grade 7 students, 59% of grade 4 students, and 60% of grade 10 students are in programs where poetry is considered important.

At both elementary and secondary grades, teachers identified the following features as important aspects of their programs:

- integration.
- the study of novels.
- the development of independent reading comprehension strategies.
- enhancing reading vocabulary.

On the other hand, the use of workbooks and other commercial skill-development materials are not considered important in many classrooms. The use of readers seems to have decreased at the elementary levels. Since the last assessment, there has been a 10% increase of teachers reporting "no reader".

Teachers also reported on the amount of class time devoted to various activities. At all grade levels, students spend a great deal of class time in discussion and working on individual assignments. At the elementary level, silent reading and vocabulary instruction also occur frequently in most classrooms. The frequency of small-group work, oral reading and listening instruction declines steadily as you move up the grade levels; note taking increases. See Appendix C for detailed tables.

Vocabulary instruction is reported more frequently than the development of comprehension strategies. The difference is particularly startling at the grade 4 level, where vocabulary activities are reported to be frequently used in 82% of classrooms compared with 62% for the development of comprehension strategies.

In general, activities are most diverse in grade 4 classrooms; least diverse in grade 10 classrooms. It is interesting to note that reading achievement and student attitudes are also highest at grade 4 and lowest at grade 10.

7.2 Relationship of program features to student performance

Students' achievement and attitude scores were related to the program features their teachers identified as important. Results indicate that weaker students encounter fewer "enriching" experiences and spend less time reading novels and poetry than do their more able counterparts. As the illustrations on page 34 show, value given to the use of workbooks is the only program feature associated with low student performance.

7.3 Strategies for Reading

Students' ability to read with understanding and enjoyment depends to a large extent upon their control of the reading process - of the strategies through which they derive meaning. Students at all grade levels were asked to indicate how often they used each of several strategies in order to "understand and remember what you read at school." Detailed results are presented in Appendix C. Results are summarized below:

- At all grades, over 65% of students report frequently previewing text features before they read, and forming mental pictures as they read.
- Approximately 50% of students often make predictions before they read; slightly more make predictions while they are reading.
- About half of the students said that they frequently look back over parts they have already read; a similar proportion stop and think about what they are reading.
- Few students at any grade level make notes either as they read or after they have finished a selection, nor do they engage in a great deal of discussion, reflection, or elaboration after reading.
- Approximately 54% of grade 4 students said they often get new ideas from their reading and research.

Substantial numbers of B.C. students report frequent use of some effective reading strategies. On the other hand, the lack of discussion, reflection, and elaboration is disturbing, along with the fact that grade 7 students report using reading strategies less often than students at other grade levels.

7.4 Evaluation methods

The following aspects of reading evaluation are consistently used at all grades:

- Students are most often evaluated on their ability to deal with literary and informative material.
- Comprehension is the element of reading most frequently considered. It is followed closely by critical thinking and vocabulary.
- Reading performance is most often assessed by questions requiring that responses be given in sentence or paragraph form.
- Most teachers evaluate reading at least twice each month.

The following distinctions were evident between teachers of different grade levels:

- At grades 4 and 7, students are more often evaluated on their development of specific reading skills.
- Emphasis on the ability to deal with persuasive materials increases at grade 10.
- Attitudes about reading become less important with increasing grade.

Chapter 8: How do Programs Promote Writing Performance?

8.1 Program features

Teachers rated the importance of a variety of program features and instructional practices. The findings of the teacher reports were consistent with student responses to questions concerning program content.

Overall, B.C. students do a great deal of writing in both language arts and other content areas. Over 80% of grade 4 and grade 7 students have written five or more pieces in the last month, and close to 90% of grade 10 students have written three or more pieces.

The following changes in th instruction of written expression occur between grades 4 and 7:

- Pre-writing becomes somewhat less important.
- Teacher assistance, including conferencing, becomes substantially less important.
- Both oral and "published" sharing of student writing becomes less important.
- Students spend much less time listening as the teacher reads.
- Students engage in journal writing much less often.
- Students spend less time working in small-groups.
- The use of computers for word-processing increases.
- Time spent using library resources increases.

The following changes appear between grades 7 and 10:

- Oral and "published" sharing of student writing continues to decline in importance.
- Peer-editing decreases substantially.
- More time is spent in copying notes from the chalkboard or from overhead transparencies.
- Computers are used less frequently for writing.
- Commercial skill-development materials are used less frequently.
- Students spend less time using library resources.

See Appendix C for detailed tables.

8.2 Strategies for writing

In recent years, instruction in written expression focused on the processes students engage in as they write. Students were asked to identify their writing strategies. The results are summarized below:

- Proofreading and editing strategies were the most frequently used strategies by students at all grade levels.
- Over 70% of students frequently visualize or form mental images before writing.
- Grade 4 students reported the greatest amount of pre-writing activity and the greatest amount of collaboration.
- Grade 10 students reported the greatest frequency of proofreading and editing.
- Grade 7 students appear to pay the least attention to audience at all stages of writing, and do the least preparation for writing. On the other hand, they are the most likely to abandon a piece of work and start over again.
- For most students, writing and revising is still a solitary activity. Fewer than half of the students frequently work with other students to improve a piece of writing (at grade 10, only 26%). However, students were even less likely to ask their teachers for help with editing or revision, particularly at grades 7 and 10.
- A discouraging number of students (20% to 25%) reported that they often (or usually) make a final copy of their writing **without changes or corrections**. At grade 4, revision most often involves checking for errors. At grades 7 and 10, students are also likely to add, change or delete material.

See Appendix C for detailed tables.

The relationship between achievement and conscious use of various writing strategies was extremely weak among grade 4 students, but stronger among grade 7 and 10 students. What students do **before** they write is considered to be most important in terms of the overall effectiveness of a piece. B.C. students, however, are more likely to spend their time proofreading, revising, or editing - activities which occur **after** the first draft has been written. On the other hand, students who reported frequent use of pre-writing and editing strategies did express more positive attitudes.

8.3 Evaluation methods

The results of questions about evaluation practices indicate that many are consistent across grade levels. For example, at all grades:

- Over 80% of teachers evaluate at least two pieces of writing each month.
- Proofreading skills are more often considered than any other aspect of writing listed.
- Drafting, pre-writing, and teacher-assisted revision are frequently considered.
- Over 80% of teachers write anecdotal comments when they evaluate student writing; close to the same number offer oral comments.
- Approximately 25% of students are frequently allowed to choose the piece of writing their teachers will evaluate.

On the other hand, there were a number of differences across grade levels:

- At grade 4, creative writing receives the most emphasis in evaluation, with expository writing and specific skills ranking second.
- At grade 7, creative and expository writing receive equal emphasis.
- At grade 10, expository writing is the primary focus of evaluation.
- Oral sharing is important to evaluation in approximately half of the classrooms at grades 4 and 7, and about one in three at grade 10.
- At grade 10, 94% of teachers frequently assign marks or grades, compared with 80% at grade 7 and close to 50% at grade 4.

Evidence of critical thinking is considered to be a major criteria in the evaluation of writing. Most teachers did not articulate evaluation practices which could specifically help them make decisions about students' development as critical thinkers. Grade 4 teachers were most likely to display understanding of the issue and to articulate the relationship between instruction and evaluation. Analysts hypothesized that this result might be attributable to the relatively strong focus on content at grades 7 and 10. Overall, responses indicated a strong need for instructional resources and support to move the focus of evaluation methods towards critical thinking curriculum objectives.

PART V: RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented here were formulated by the Contract Team and are based on the results described in this report. In developing the recommendations, the Contract Team also considered suggestions and responses from educators who participated in the Assessment as members of the Interpretation Panels and marking committees. It is recommended that those involved in education in British Columbia direct attention to the following:

1. **Emphasize the development of effective thinking, reading, and writing strategies.** Increase opportunities for students to:

   - Explicitly recognize the value and appropriate use of independent language and learning strategies.
   - Collaborate and engage in small-group discussion which can foster the development of higher level thinking, language, and interpersonal skills. These activities can be particularly effective in helping to stimulate pre-reading, pre-writing, elaboration of ideas and responses, reflection, and revision.
   - Offer, elaborate and substantiate their ideas about a selection both orally and in writing. This practice will help them to develop strategies for responding personally, for critical reading, and for persuasive speaking and writing.
   - Acquire strategies for integrating references to a text when writing about reading selections.

In the case of **reading**, students should have increased exposure to:

- Pre-reading activities which activate prior knowledge and increase their engagement with the material.
- Strategies which help students to reflect and elaborate on what they have read.
- Guided practice of effective strategies for dealing with both literary materials and materials in the content areas.

In the case of **writing**, students should develop strategies which help them to:

- Explore, elaborate, and extend their ideas before they begin writing a draft.
- Enhance the following features in their writing: a sense of voice and structure; the elaboration of ideas; the effective use of sensory and connotative language; and a variety in sentences and level of detail.
- Select appropriate structures and features for writing in different forms and genres.
- Recognize that simple recopying to improve neatness and handwriting is an inefficient use of writing time.

2. **Increase the range of reading materials and resources available for study and enjoyment.** Ensure that students at all grades:

   - Have continued access to quality reading materials in a variety of genres, including literature, nonfiction, magazines, newspapers.
   - Receive instructional support and practice for both guided and independent use of these materials.
   - Experience poetry as an integral part of their English language arts program. Teachers, particularly at grade 7, should recognize that poetry can enrich students' lives and enhance their thinking and language skills.

3. **Clearly inform parents about the important role that leisure reading and writing can play in helping their children to become effective readers and writers.** In connection with this aspect of language development:

   - Research should be undertaken to explore possible causes of the dramatic increase in positive attitudes and leisure reading at grade 4.
   - Results which illuminate student attitudes should receive some prominence in discussion and reporting of results of this assessment.

4. **Continually monitor evaluation practices to ensure that a variety of appropriate strategies are employed to evaluate student achievement and attitudes.** Specifically:

   - Teachers should receive information, resources, and training to enhance their awareness and expertise in a wide variety of measurement and evaluation techniques.
   - Resources and procedures developed for this assessment should be widely distributed.
   - Techniques such as inventories, learning logs, reflective discussion and interviews should be promoted as ways of monitoring and extending students' use of independent reading and writing strategies.
   - Evaluation programs or activities should be continually monitored to ensure that strong connections are maintained among curriculum, instruction, and evaluation.

5. **Re-examine the programs and resources which are offered to low achieving students.** Specifically:

   - Ensure that these students experience a rich literacy environment which can enhance their development.

   - Focus on helping them to develop thoughtful and coherent sets of strategic reading and writing competencies which they can use in all areas of the curriculum.

6. **Monitor programs and materials to ensure that there is no gender bias which might be a disadvantage to male students.**

7. **Ensure that instructional resources and professional development opportunities are available to foster these recommendations.**

Appendix A: Procedures

Overview

The Student Assessment Branch directed and coordinated all aspects of the assessment and convened the advisory committee consisting of teachers, university professors, and Ministry personnel, which provided advice and review during development of the assessment materials. All tests, questionnaires, marking procedures, and the Technical report were developed by a Contract Team from Horizon Research and Evaluation Affiliates. Committees of teachers reviewed all tests and questionnaires developed for the assessment.

An interpretation panel composed of teachers, administrators, parents, and trustees determined acceptable and desirable standards of performance, and evaluated the results in the light of these standards.

Reading: The Assessment Tests

Reading performance results are derived from two test forms. **Form M,** was administered to all B.C. students at the relevant grade level. Provincial, district and school results were calculated for this form which included an attitude survey and a series of reading passages and multiple-choice questions. **Form W**, was administered in a random sample of classrooms at each grade level. Only provincial results were calculated for this form which included a series of reading passages along with questions which required students to compose extended responses. Sample stimulus passages and questions appear in the Technical Report.

At grade 4, 36,483 students (100% of provincial enrollment) responded to 36 multiple-choice questions based on five selections: a story about a cat who outwits some monkeys; a story told by a whale; an article about the mola fish; an article about the creator of Garfield; and a poem. A sample of 3035 students also composed answers to 10 written-response questions based on a poem and a story about a handicapped cat, along with three selections which also appeared on the multiple-choice form.

At grade 7, 35 291 students (100% of provincial enrollment) responded to 40 multiple-choice questions based on six selections: a short story about a young runaway who wants to go home; an anecdote about a woman who steals a quarter from a waitress's tip; a students editorial about prejudice; an article about caving; a report on new discoveries about the pyramids; and a poem. A sample of 3237 students also responded to 13 written-response questions based on an excerpt from a novel by Monica Hughes and two poems by Canadian high school students along with two selections which appeared on the multiple-choice form.

At grade 10, 29 945 students (80% of provincial enrollment) were asked to respond to 40 multiple-choice questions based on six selections: an essay by Paul St. Pierre; an account from **Ten Lost Years** by Barry Broadfoot; a science fiction story; an excerpt from the introduction to Debbie Brill's autobiography; an article about cat's whiskers, and a poem written by a Vancouver student. A sample of 2653 students also composed

answers to 12 written-response questions based on an article about market research, an excerpt from a short story by Edna Alford, poems by Edwin Varney and Geoffrey Lehmann, and the science fiction story which also appeared on the multiple-choice form.

Writing: The Assessment Tests

Results for written expression are derived from two test forms. On **Form E**, students were asked to write an extended narrative on one of two topics. They also responded to an attitude survey and a series of questions about writing strategies. On **Form S**, students were asked to write two short compositions: one expressing an opinion about an issue relevant to their age level; another, describing a special objects or treasure of their own. This form also included questions on the the value of writing for a variety of purposes and on the amount of writing done in free time and in school.

At grade 4, a sample of 2659 students responded to the extended writing task. They were offered a choice between writing about themselves, or writing to complete an imaginary story about a mysterious box. The two short compositions were completed by 2938 students. For one of these, grade 4 students were asked to express their opinions about whether or not pets should be allowed in all neighbourhoods. For other compositions, students were asked to describe a special object or treasure that was important to them. The "special object" topic was used at all three grade levels.

A sample of 2875 students responded to the extended writing task at grade 7. They chose between writing an imaginative story about a robot who was their identical twin, or writing a personal narrative about a time when they were extremely angry. A sample of 3100 grade 7 students completed two short compositions. In one composition, students expressed their opinions about bringing skateboards, radios, or bicycles to school. In the other, students described a personal treasure.

At grade 10, 2794 students responded to the extended writing task which offered a choice between writing a story about greed or a personal narrative about change. A sample of 2845 students completed two short compositions. In one composition, students expressed their opinions about the use of violence to protect property against theft. Like their counterparts at grades 4, and 7, they were also asked to describe a personal treasure.

Scoring

- Multiple-choice - Reading: responses were machine-scored.

- Written-response - Reading: Readers dealt with one item at a time. Training and calibration papers were provided for each item; scoring was monitored by room leaders. Reliability estimates were based on a sample of 100 papers which were photocopied and randomly inserted into the marking packages.

- Extended narrative - Writing: Two separate marking teams were involved in scoring the extended writing. Papers were scored holistically by one marking team, with each paper receiving two independent readings. Room leaders monitored agreement among readers and adjudicated any scores which were discrepant by more than one scale-point. Training and calibration papers were provided and re-calibration sessions held twice each day. These papers were scored by a second team of readers where one reader assigned analytic ratings for three elements: style, structure, and mechanic (conventions of standard English). Room leaders again conducted training and re-calibration sessions and monitored consistency of the scoring.

- Short compositions - Writing: The shorter writing samples were scored holistically by one marking team, with each paper receiving two independent readings. Readers were first trained to score the opinion pieces; on the third day of the marking session, they turned their attention to the descriptive writing. Room leaders monitored agreement among readers and adjudicated any scores which were discrepant by more than one scale-point. Training and calibration papers were provided and re-calibration sessions held twice each day.

Program Variables

In all grades 4, 7, and 10 classes, teachers received a set of ten questions which asked them to rate the importance of each of ten features or activities to their reading/literature programs, and were instructed to dictate responses to students for recording on the machine-scorable answer sheets which accompanied the multiple-choice forms (Form M).

In the samples of classrooms where students completed Form W (written-response reading), E (extended writing), and S (shorter writing), teachers were asked to respond to an extensive questionnaire about instructional and evaluation practices for both reading and writing.

Potential questions for these questionnaires were drawn from previous research and from a province-wide survey conducted by Curriculum Branch in 1987. The Technical Subcommittee designed the final forms based on th recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

Student Profiles

Each test form included a number of background questions; several of these appeared on both multiple-choice and written-response forms to enable comparisons among the various samples. (Samples of students responding to each of the written response forms appear to be representative of the provincial population.)

Results of the background questions were consistent across grade levels and indicated no substantial changes since 1984. There were increases of about 2% in students reporting English as a second language and between 2% and 4% in those reporting more than 100 books in their homes.

- Approximately equal numbers of male and female students participated in the assessment.
- Close to 15% reported English as a second language, while less than 10% currently spoke a language other than English at home.
- Between 7% and 8% have attended ESL classes; less than 3% currently do so.
- Close to 80% of B.C. students reported having more than 100 books in their homes, and nearly 50% reported more than 250.
- Between 40% and 50% said that they had used a computer for writing in their leisure time within the last month.
- Over 70% of grade 10 students plan to continue their education: 44% at university (36% in 1984); 17% at a community college (15% in 1984); 11% at other institutions (14% in 1984). However, their expectations may be unrealistic, in terms of the entrance requirements and the current capacity of B.C. universities.

Appendix B: Samples of Superior Student Writing

Extended Narrative - Grade 4

The Box

There, in the box was two eyes that seemed to be squinting. Suddenly the box sucked everything in site into it, including us. We seemed to be falling, then we came down with a hummugeos thud!!!! We saw creatures dancing around a fire. They were carrying swords and shields. Then from behind, we heard twigs crack. We were sarrounded. We had nowhere to go, in the distance I hear lapping of waves. We fought our way through the creatures and ran!! We saw a hollow log, we climbed in.

Later, after the coase was clear we made camp and went to sleep The next day we made a raft we tried floating it. It didn't work! It sank!!! We put to tires that we found in the bushes. It worked! We traveled for many day before siting land. We had fish for breakfast and made a lodge and settled down. Then we set out to find food. After 30 minutes we saw a dragon scorching everything in site. there was a animal near the dragon. We tried to save it but the dragon would not let us. We knew that the dragon would eat it soon! We spent 10 minutes making weopons to slay the dragon. We shot arrows rocks daggars and sticks. At last we through water on it and it melted away!!!

The end

Extended Narrative - Grade 7

"Emma! Emma Jane!" I could hear my older sister's irritating voice calling my name. Let her call a little longer. I had absolutley no desire to be babysat by Zinta. Last time was a disaster. This time was going to be different. Yes, I'd let Zinta find me for once.

I didn't wait for long. I knew she would want me to walk to our neighbor's, through the boogie man trail. I knew the truth behind that path. Yes, Zinta had built it up until I was paranoid of even walking past the entrance. Sure enough,

"Come - on Emms, let's go over!" Lord, Zinta was dense. "It'll be fun. I won't let the scary stuff get you." I had no choice. The inevitable was inevitable. What kind of five year old could argue with that logic!? Not me. So, reluctantley, I followed my sister to my doom.

The chores we had to do were easy. Feed the cat, the chickens, I knew the routine at Mr. Boe's. No, I had no worry there. It was the trip home I dreaded. Even I knew about dusk and it's effect on strange beasts. Would I survive?

"Come on, Emma, let's go home." The time was approaching. We walked up the road, nearer and nearer to the entrance of The Path. My knees knocking, teeth chattering, heart pounding, I sent an apprehensive glance to Zinta.

Now, Zinta was not thrilled at the prospect of spending her evening with me. She was looking for some fun, and a five year old brat's fears were a good place to start. I never even considered doubting her word, for, as she put it, her word was gospel.

Zinta's voice broke my thoughts. Her low whisper sent shivers down my back.

"Look!! Overthere."

I was scared now. She knew it, and used it to her advantage. "Do you know how to keep goblins away?" She asked.

"No" I replied shakily.

"I do." Like I said, her word was gospel, and I believed her.

"Please, please, please tell me!" I begged for her mercy.

"Alls you hafta do is jump up and down and squawk like a rooster." Her very words. And so that's how I was caught, hopping up and down squawking like a rooster crying my eyes out as my sister laughed till my 'sides ached'. I was <u>mad</u> when mom told me 'it was just a cruel joke, honey.' I cried and screamed and called her every foul name I could think of until she threw me in our pond. Oh, well. This time was a disaster. Maybe next time will be different.

The end

Extended Narrative - Grade 10

In every human being's nature, there is an element of lust which is commonly refered to as "greed." Greed exists in every person, but in some it is more evident than in others. For example, a thief has more evidence of greed than a good, upright citizen; but both are influenced by this character trait.

Greed often results in loss. People with a more evident or a more developed sense of self-fulfilment often take higher risks to satisfy this urge and thus are statistically more likely to lose in one form or another.

Aesop's tale demonstrates this principle clearly: the dog in the story has a bone (his needs are fulfilled) but his sense of greed drives him to risk his bone by dropping it so that he may obtain another (which was quite
unnecessary) and thus he had less than he had had in the first place.

This principle of greed is also seen in modern Western society. Our society is one of immense focus on money or possessions. The greed of its members have driven them to commit horrendous acts which, if viewed objectively and rationally, seem insane, crazy, and sometimes even ludicrous and yet the same mistake is made every day.

For an example, one might point to the decade from 1930-1940. When the World Stock Exchange collapsed, the world went into depression which drove them to start one of man's darkest hours, the Second World War. For the sake of a few million dollars, many millions of people were killed and maimed, lands and countries were destroyed and the effects are still being seen today. All as a result of greed.

Another example is quite common in our modern world: the afore mentioned stock market. People who have money enough to use as a working capital are lured by promise of quick money with no work. These fine citizens risk most of their assets so that they can gain more (which they have no need of) and often end their escapades losing all they own.

This sort of incarnation or result of greed was quite common in the gold rushes in California in 1848 and in the Klondike in 1897. Men would sell all they owned to buy land in the gold area and move to it; often dying on their claims poor and lonely, forgotten victims of their own greed.

But naturally not all greed is rewarded so graphically. The natural law of cause and effect sometimes skips over a few lucky people who win in a lottery or make large sums of money in the Stock Exchange but these people are not evidence against the law, they are simply the exception that proves the rule.

Before one submits to one's greedy lusts and risks all one has, one must ask: "Is the risk worth it? Am I sure to win?" because usually - although not always - greed destroys the one it infests.

Short Composition - Grade 4

I have a treasure that is very, very special. It is a piano.

The color of the piano is chestnut brown. It has ivory white keys. It is about 1 ½ metres high and about 2 meters wide (or maybe wider).

The piano has a sort of short board that folds up for the piano book. The piano has three lollipopp-looking pedals. They are golden yellow in color. One on the right is the Soft pedal. The left pedal is the Damper pedal. The middle one has a name but I don't really know the name. I just named it "Super Soft pedal."

The piano looks very elegant and takes alot of skill to play. I always play songs on the piano. I like the sound most of all.

Short Composition - Grade 7

I think that bicycles should be allowed on school grounds for many reasons. One reason is that, to get to and from school, students do not have to depend on adults to drive them. Bicycling is also quite convenient. It is a lot faster than walking, it is healthy, and it takes less effort to push down on the pedals than it takes to take a step. Bicycles also save gas. Gas is a non-renewable resource that we are running out of. If everyone rode a bike to school, there would not be as much of a polution problem. It would not take a lot of work or money to install bicycle racks; and it would probably pay off in the end. In conclusion, I would say that bicycles are a healthy, clean way of transportation and I do not see any reason for them to be banned from school grounds.

Short Composition - Grade 10

I am going to write about two treasures that mean a lot to me. One is emotional and one is a symbol. Both of these treasures mean a great deal to me and I hope to keep them near me forever.

The first one is my friendship with my best friend. My best friend and I have known each other for six years and we are very close right now. We have become closer throughout the past year because of a disease. My best friend is sick and needs support and help. It is a psycological disease and does not show outwardly. She and I are open to each other and tell each other everything. A lot of friends tell each other how much they mean to each other all the time, on paper, in words, over the phone. My friend and I do not say every day how much we mean to each other but when we do it seems so real, not fake in any way. It's like receiving a red rose, it is something that can't be done every day or it looses its importants, people only want to receive a rose from someone they really love. I hope that our friendship will last forever and if for some reason it doesn't I will feel as though I will have lost a part of myself. She is the best friend I could ever have asked for.

The other treasure that means a lot to me is the ocean. I have lived by the ocean all my life and when I go away I feel closed in and cornered. The ocean to me is wild, exciting and free. Nothing can control it and it is a symbol of freedom to me. I love watching the waves roll in onto the beach, clinging to the sand. I do not think I would be as happy living away from the ocean. It play a big part in my life. I look at it as a symbol of happiness that I want to keep forever.

Appendix C: Selected Data Tables

Table C.1
Reported Use of Reading Strategies by Grade Level

Strategy	% of Students Reporting Frequent Use* Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10
BEFORE READING			
Preview text features	65.6	70.9	74.9
Make predictions	55.6	49.3	49.2
Recall other selections on topics	50.9	39.8	40.9
Think about own knowledge of topic	43.9	39.7	34.3
WHILE READING			
Form mental pictures	76.8	82.1	83.8
Make predictions	60.7	57.0	54.7
Look back at parts already read	49.6	49.4	51.3
Stop and think about selection	53.2	47.9	48.4
Make notes	16.8	15.2	10.6
AFTER READING			
Talk to someone else about it	39.6	36.0	38.3
Compare with own experiences	33.6	29.1	35.3
Look back over selection	46.6	39.5	34.3
Get new ideas for reading/research	53.7	39.4	33.8
Think about related selections	43.3	33.4	32.6
Write down notes or ideas	20.4	16.5	13.5
Write something of own on same topic	27.5	15.4	9.7

* Column entries are the percent of students who chose "Most of the Time" or "Quite Often" as opposed to "Once in a While" or "Never."

Table C.2
Reported Use of Writing Strategies by Grade Level

Strategy	% of Students Reporting Frequent Use* Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10
BEFORE WRITING FIRST DRAFT			
Form mental pictures or images	79.2	78.3	72.0
Think about audience	52.5	46.1	50.9
Work with others to get ideas	56.4	49.7	46.1
Group ideas (e.g., outline, cluster)	47.8	43.6	44.0
Write down ideas (e.g., list, web)	43.1	38.7	42.3
WHEN WRITING FIRST DRAFT			
Think about audience	49.7	42.3	45.9
Talk to teacher or other students	48.8	45.6	43.3
Change ideas about the topic	39.4	46.5	41.9
Throw work out and start again	18.3	24.2	21.7
AFTER WRITING FIRST DRAFT			
Check for errors; make corrections	80.2	86.6	87.1
Add ideas or information	68.5	81.4	82.2
Change words or sentences	63.7	79.0	78.7
Delete some materials	55.2	73.3	75.6
Move sentences or paragraphs	29.7	44.6	55.5
Think about audience	46.6	38.7	40.9
Work with peers to improve the piece	41.6	37.5	25.6
Ask teachers for help	37.8	24.7	20.4
Copy work without any corrections	26.2	20.1	18.8
Change most of the first draft	19.0	19.5	18.5

* Students chose from four responses: Most of the Time; Quite Often; Once in a While; Never. The column entries here are the percent of students who chose "Most of the Time" or "Quite Often."

Table C.3
Reasons why students value writing

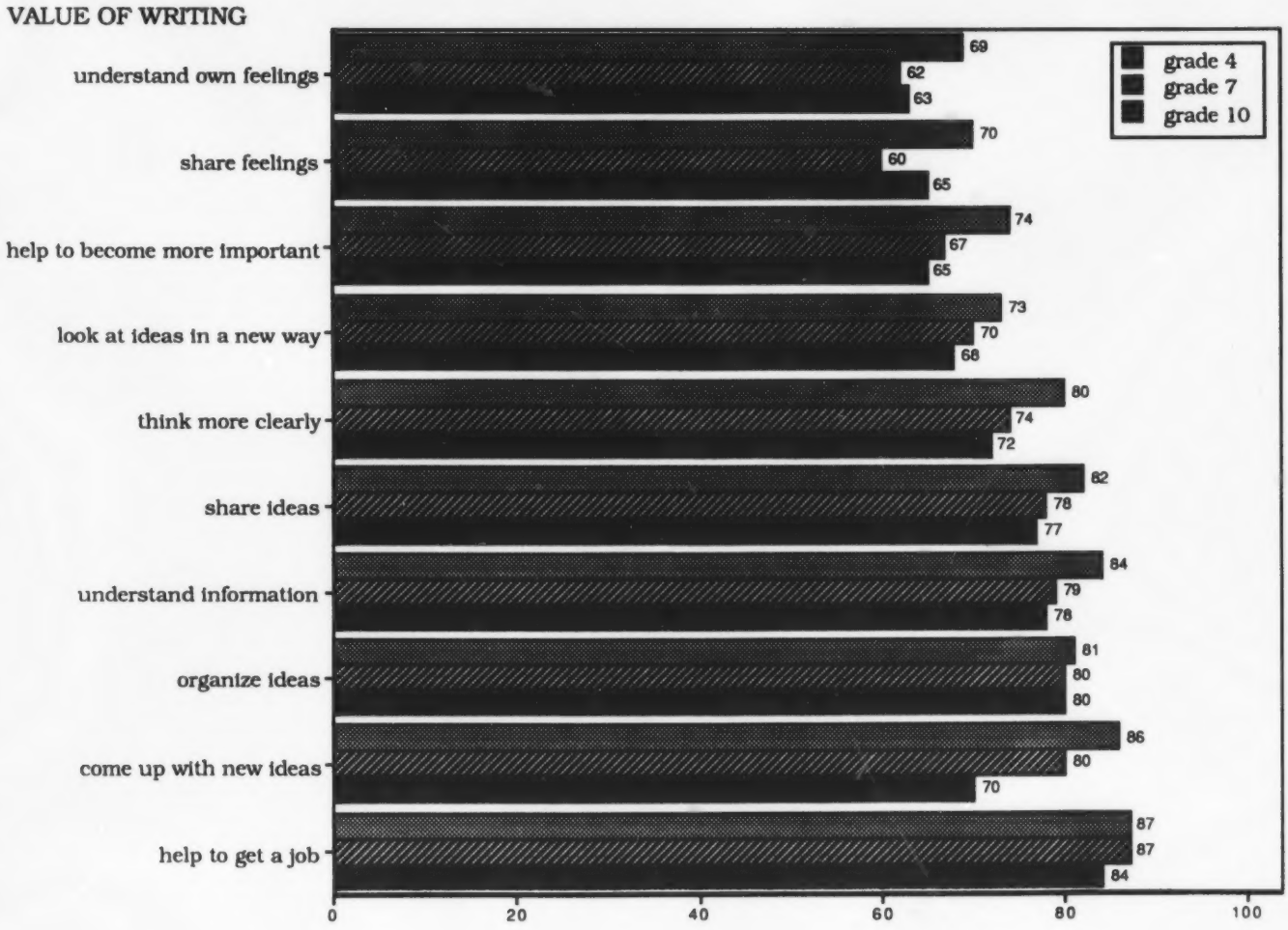


Table C.4
Importance of Program Features by Grade Level

Feature	% Indicating Important to Program* Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10
READING			
Integrating reading, writing, listening and speaking	94.0	93.1	90.3
Study of novels	85.6	85.7	86.7
Developing independent strategies for reading comprehension	86.0	85.6	80.1
Specific activities for enhancing reading vocabulary	85.7	84.3	72.7
Independent reading/research projects	85.5	86.5	71.8
Small group discussions	75.2	69.4	62.8
Poetry	58.6	46.1	60.3
Development of note taking strategies	-	-	59.5
"Buddy" or partner reading	54.0	36.7	-
Prepared oral reading	56.1	52.9	52.7
Workbooks/other commercial skill-development materials	49.6	38.0	26.3
WRITTEN EXPRESSION			
Integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking	94.0	92.7	91.6
Proofreading strategies and activities	88.1	86.2	79.0
Direct instruction for specific skills or techniques	81.6	83.9	79.0
Individual pre-writing activities	79.5	73.2	76.8
Teacher-assisted revising and editing	86.8	77.8	76.0
Shared pre-writing activities	94.0	86.6	73.6
Student/class oral sharing	88.9	79.9	68.4
Teacher-student conferences	72.6	62.7	59.5
Sentence-combining practice	64.5	64.2	56.8
Peer-group revising and editing	64.1	65.2	48.4
Student/class "publications"	69.5	59.3	29.6

* Teachers selected from a four-point scale: Essential; Quite Important; Of Limited Use; Not Useful to answer the question, "How important is each of the following to your reading/literature program?" For this table, "Essential" and "Quite Important" responses have been combined as "Important."

Table C.5
Frequency of Language Arts Activities by Grade Level

Activity	% of Teachers Reporting as a Frequent Activity* Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10
Students...			
Participate in class discussions	90	86	81
Work individually on writing assignments	79	79	74
Read silently	91	81	54
Receive instruction for enhancing vocabulary	82	72	50
Receive instruction on independent strategies for reading comprehension	62	64	48
Listen as the teacher reads	79	57	44
Work in small groups	55	44	35
Copy notes from the chalkboard or overhead projector	13	16	26
Read orally	54	41	25
Engage in journal writing	47	29	25
Receive instruction or guided practice for listening	38	31	21
Use library resources	51	54	19
Use workbooks or other commercial skill-development materials	41	26	18
View media resources	26	22	17
Make formal presentations	26	24	16
Engage in informal drama	15	13	8
Use computers for writing (word processing)	15	21	6
Use computer-assisted activities for developing specific skills	10	9	2

* The column entries here are the percent of teachers who chose "Frequently, for a major part of class time" or "Frequently, for a small part of class time." Other response options were "Occasionally, for a major part of class time, "Occasionally, for a small part of class time," and "Never."

Table C.6
Average Reading Scores and Panel Ratings

Domain	Grade 4 Average	Grade 4 Rating*	Grade 7 Average	Grade 7 Rating*	Grade 10 Average	Grade 10 Rating*
Literal Comprehension	73.7	VS	74.4	VS	69.7	S
Inferential Comprehension	67.7	VS	76.3	VS	67.6	S+
Critical Comprehension	--	--	65.8	S	59.2	S+
Total Test	71.1	VS	72.9	VS	65.4	S

Table C.7
Panel Ratings* for Written Expression

	Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10
Extended Writing:			
Holistic rating (overall impact)	VS	S	S
Analytic Rating: style	S	S	VS
Analytic Rating: structure/organization	S	S	S
Analytic Rating: conventions of English	S	S	VS
Short (Directed) Writing			
Opinion: holistic rating	S	S	S
Description: holistic rating	S	S	S

* Panel Ratings on a five-point scale:

ST - Strong
VS - Very Satisfactory
S - Satisfactory
M - Marginal
W - Weak